OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER



AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATAR… -OP | MOBILE



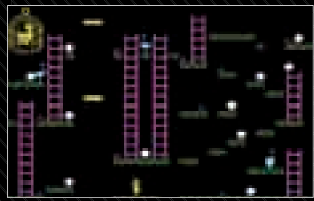
SNK

THE DEATH AND REBIRTH OF SNK IN THE FINAL PART OF OUR TRILOGY

THE MAKING OF...

CHUCKIE EGG

CREATOR NIGEL ALDERTON TALKS ABOUT OSTRICHES, LADDERS AND DONKEY KONG



WWW.RETROGAMER.NET

THE BIG INTERVIEW...

PAC-MAN VR

THE INSIDE SCOOP ON THE PAC-MAN GAME THAT NEVER WAS

THE MAKING OF...

QUAKE

JOHN ROMERO ON THE FULL IMPACT OF id'S SEMINAL SHOOTER

THE ULTIMATE INSIDE STORY...

MORTAL KOMBAT

FINISH HIM!!

FROM FATALITY TO BANALITY: THE KOMPLETE MK HISTORY

■ FULL GAME KRONOLOGY ■ KOLOSSAL CHARACTER DOSSIER ■ ED BOON SPEAKS!!



THIS MONTH IN RETRO GAMER

NEC'S PC ENGINE
RETROINSPECTION: THE GREATEST 16-BIT CONSOLE YOU NEVER PLAYED

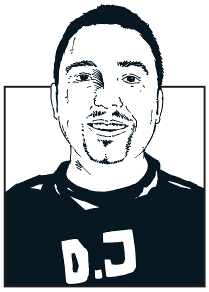
ARCHON
BEHIND THE SCENES OF A CLASSIC 8-BIT BOARD GAME

RADIANT SILVERGUN
PAYING HOMAGE TO ONE OF TREASURE'S MOST BELOVED SHOOT-'EM-UPS

MEL CROUCHER
IN THE CHAIR WITH THE LEGENDARY 8-BIT CODER

THE RETROBATES

BEST MORTAL KOMBAT FATALITY



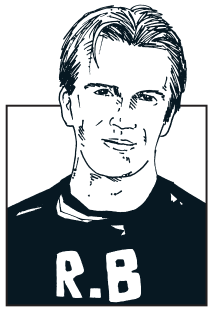
DARRAN JONES

Hmmm, I'll have to go for Liu Kang's dragon fatality in *Mortal Kombat II*. Mainly because it was the only one I could ever actually do.

Expertise: Writing very, very quickly

Currently playing:
Pac-Man Championship Edition

Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



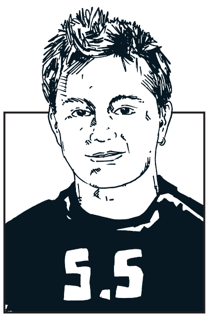
RICHARD BURTON

For pure comedy value I always liked Quan Chi's fatality move in *MK4*. Rip your opponent's leg off and beat them to death with it. Now that's what I call getting a good kicking.

Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming

Currently playing:
Make A Nursery

Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



SPANNER

Maybe not the best character, but you can't fault the classics: Kano's heart rip from *MK1*. It's, like, soooo *Temple Of Doom*!

Expertise:
Cardiopulmonary evacuation

Currently playing:
Trauma Centre: Under The Knife

Favourite game of all time:
Death



MIKE TOOLEY

Best fatality has to be Kano in *MK1*. He defeats his opponent, stands back and looks them up and down and removes their still beating heart. How I loved doing that.

Expertise: Games that few have heard of and less have played

Currently playing:
Command & Conquer 3

Favourite game of all time:
Mr Do!



DAVID CROOKES

Getting Johnny Cage to perform a swift uppercut to knock his opponent's head right off for the first time was an absolute joy. Easy to do and so effective.

Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, Dizzy, Atari Lynx and PlayStation

Currently playing:
Impossible Mission DS

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



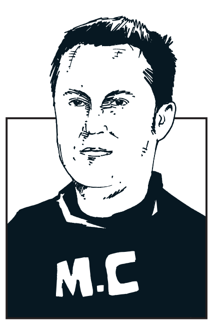
PAUL DRURY

Liu Kang crushing you with a *Mortal Kombat* cab is very post-modern but I'll go for Kitana and Mileena's deadly kisses. It's all about the kicking up of the heels.

Expertise: Getting programmers to confess their drug habits

Currently playing:
Elite Beat Agents

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



MARTYN CARROLL

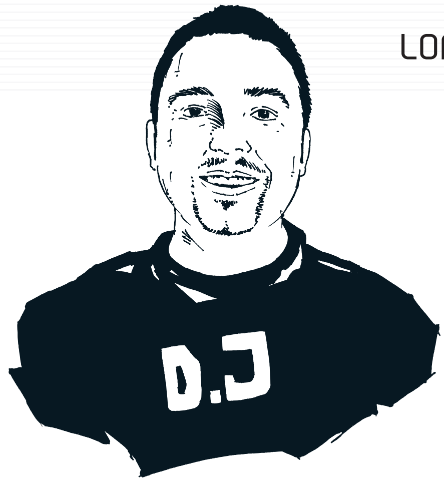
MK3 has the maddest fatalities of them all. My favourite is when Jax gets super-sized and stomps his opponent, showering blood and bone everywhere.

Expertise: Applied physical oceanography

Currently playing:
Tomb Raider Anniversary

Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy

LOADING...



When *Mortal Kombat* first appeared in arcades back in 1992 it immediately caught the attention of gamers thanks to its digitised visuals, gory combat and gruesome fatalities. Whilst it lacked the refinement of Capcom's *Street Fighter II*, it became extremely popular and eventually went on to spawn numerous sequels, two movies and even a TV show.

With a brand new title currently available on Nintendo's Wii, there's never been a better time to look back at Midway's fun, if somewhat flawed, franchise. So head on over to page 26 where you'll find an in-depth look at the bloodthirsty series, complete with brand new comments from co-creator Ed Boon.

If you're not a fan of *Mortal Kombat*, don't worry though, for as always, Retro Gamer has every base well and truly covered. 8-bit lovers are catered for with features on *Aliens*, *Archon*, Mel Croucher and *Chuckie Egg*, while those with a preference for console-related shenanigans can look forward to articles on the PC Engine and SNK. If that's not enough to whet your appetites then how about in-depth features on both id Software and the mighty *Quake*? We really do spoil you.

Enjoy the magazine







CONTENTS

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES

INSIDE

At-a-glance retro sections…







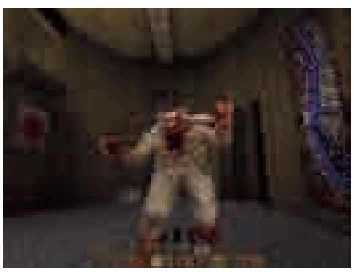


ESSENTIALS

COMPANY PROFILE



THE MAKING OF...

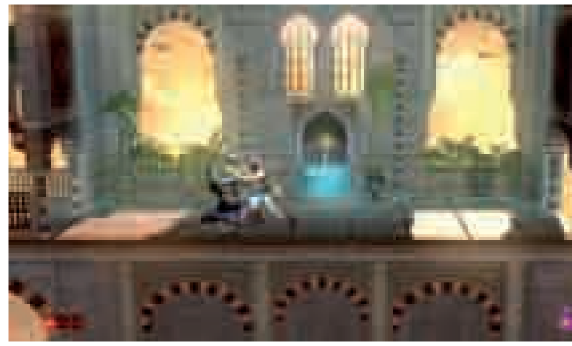


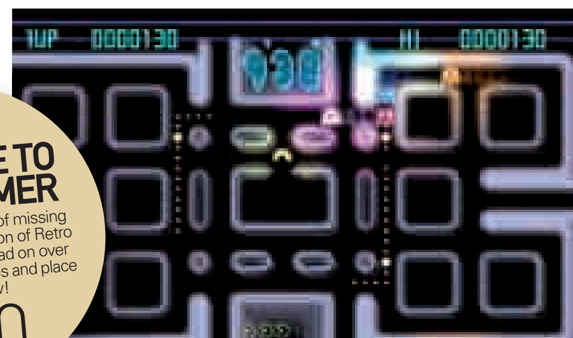
RETRORATED



THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it





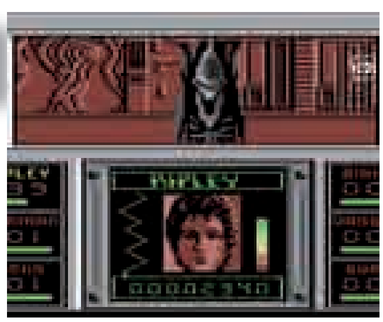
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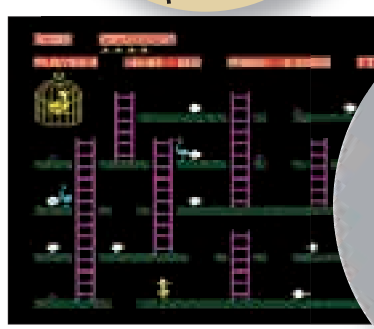
Can't stand the thought of missing the next marvellous edition of Retro Gamer? Then simply head on over to our subscriptions pages and place your order now!

p100

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK







SNK
PART THREE

THE MAKING OF...
ALIENS

THE MAKING OF...
CHUCKIE EGG

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…

RETRO OVERLOAD

PRESENTING THE FIRST 30 ISSUES OF RETRO GAMER

Ever since Retro Gamer relaunched we've had constant requests for two things: a new cover disc and access to the original magazines that were first published by Live Publishing. Although we're still not convinced that a cover disc is the best thing for the magazine, we've finally decided that the time was right to release a compilation of previous issues, so here it is – the first 30 issues of everyone's favourite retro magazine and plenty more besides.

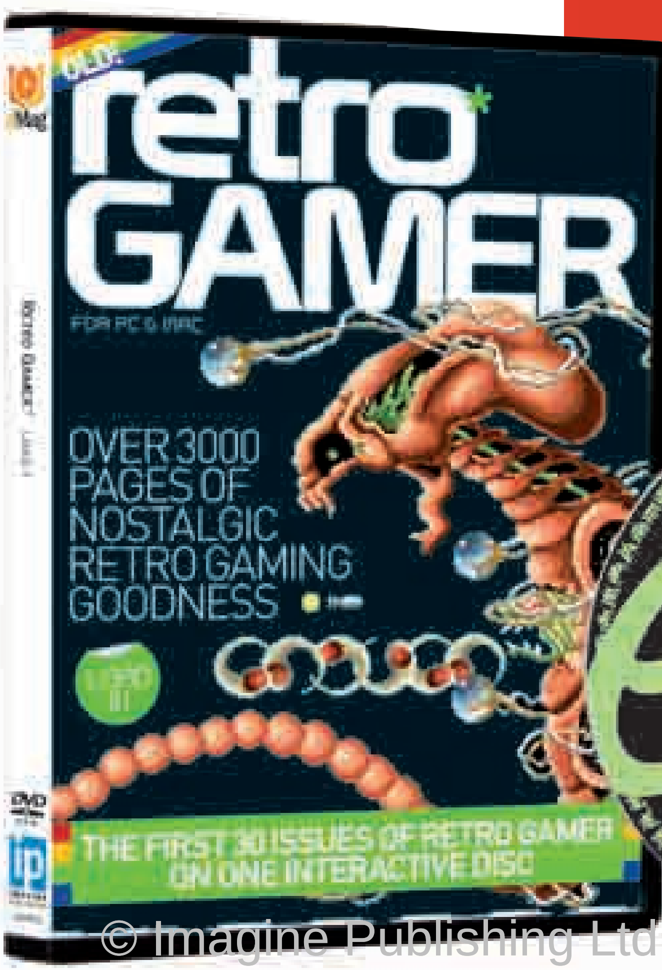
As well as cramming 30 magazines onto just one DVD, we've also added brand new bonus features, including stylish desktops featuring a variety of classic Retro Gamer covers, the ability to create your own Retro Gamer covers and a brand new article charting the rise and fall of the original Retro Gamer and its subsequent relaunch. In short there's something here for everybody, so whether you've been with us from the very beginning or have just joined the party, you should find this eMag an essential purchase and a superb resource.

So without further ado allow us to guide you through the very first Retro Gamer eMag. Oh, and don't worry, the Retro Gamer eMag is compatible with both PCs and Macs.

1 CONTENTS

Okay, so this is where it all begins. From this menu you'll be able to reach anything you need, from the ability to look at specific magazines to discovering what senior designer Sarah Bell actually looks like (in pixel form at least).







The Retro Gamer eMag can be purchased from the Imagine eShop for the bargain price of £19.99. Orders can be placed at **http://www.imagineshop.co.uk/**

HERO OF THE MONTH



ECCO THE DOLPHIN

Every month, Retro Gamer looks at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of Ecco the Dolphin.

First appearance: *Ecco The Dolphin*

Distinguishing features: Bottlenose

Weapon of choice: Powerful dash attack

Most likely to: Use his sonar to unlock glyphs

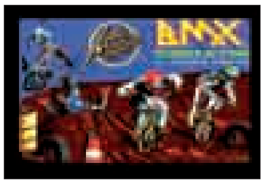
Least likely to: Make an appearance at SeaWorld

Unusual fact: Creator Novotrade changed its name to Appaloosa and recently released *Jaws Unleashed* for the PS2 and Xbox.

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 22: BMX SIMULATOR

This fantastic loading screen promises plenty of thrills and spills once the game has finally loaded. Full of detail, it's an action-packed scene that manages to capture all the excitement of racing hell for leather on an actual BMX course. In the words of creator Richard Darling, it's "brilliant, absolutely brilliant!"



JUST IN FANS OF THE PSONE MAY BE PLEASED TO HEAR THAT CRASH BANDICOOT, JUMPING FLASH, MEDIEVIL, SYPHON FILTER AND WIPEOUT ARE ALL NOW AVAILABLE IN THE PS3'S ONLINE STORE.

2 HOW TO USE THE DISC

If you're new to eMags then this section will tell you every you need to know in order to successfully navigate to wherever you want to go. It's extremely user-friendly, so you'll be able to find your way around in moments.



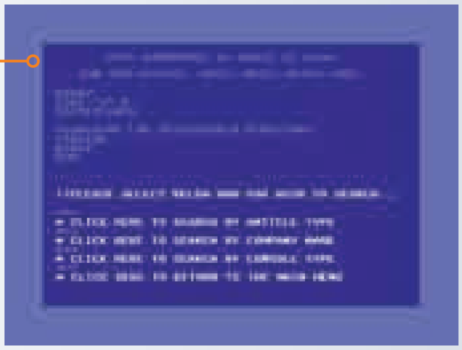
3 SELECT AN ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

This is where you'll find all the good stuff. Virtually every feature from the first 30 issues can be found here, so you can expect to find everything from in-depth articles on *Jet Set Willy* to informative Retroinspections on the ZX Spectrum, Mega Drive and Commodore 64.



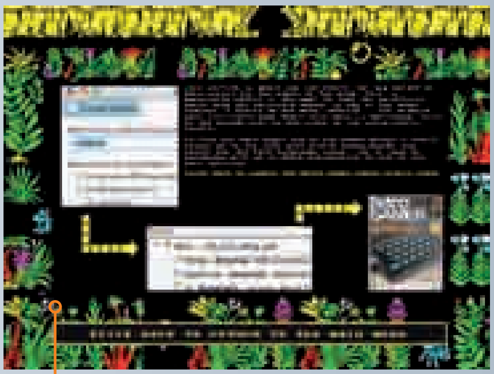
4 QUICK SEARCH

If you can't be bothered to search through specific issues then why not use the Quick Search function? From here you'll be able to look for features tied to specific Retro Gamer articles, consoles and computers, or just company names. So if you just want to read every article by Archer Maclean you'll find them all to be just one click away.



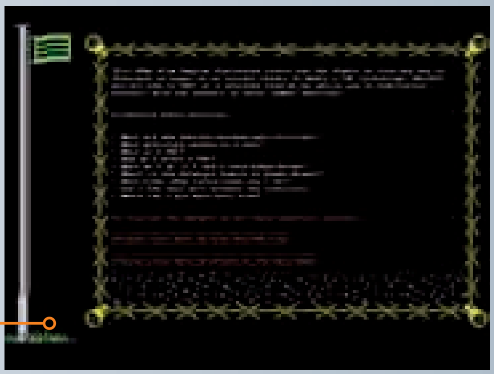
5 ADVANCED SEARCH

If you want to be really specific you can find every article that contains certain words of phrases and it's set up so you can find them in either the article you're reading or every PDF document contained on the disc. Don't worry if you don't have Acrobat Reader as it's included on the disc.



6 HELP AND FAQS

This little section explains everything from the minimum specs you'll need to run the disc, to printing out PDFs and using the disc without the interface. It's all fairly straightforward, meaning we'll quickly move on to all the wonderful bonus features…



7 BONUS MATERIAL

Presented by a pixellated form of Darran, you'll find some stylish wallpapers, PDF and PSD files for creating your own Retro Gamer covers, and a detailed interview about the creation of Retro Gamer, featuring both Darran Jones and original editor Martyn Carroll. You'll also find the original Retro Bookazine with the very best content from the first 24 issues of sister magazine gamesTM, which originally sold for £9.99.



8 WEBSITE

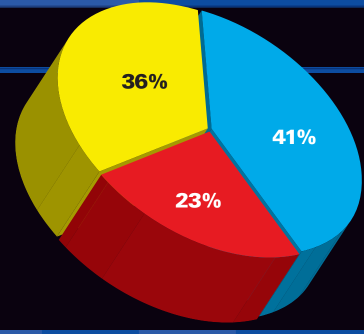
Last but by no means least is a quick link to Retro Gamer online, where you can visit the website or participate in our active forum. There's a great bunch of people here and Darran stops by whenever he can. So if you want to chat about the latest issue, or retro gaming in general, then this is the best place to head to.



HOT TOPICS

WILL YOU MISS THE DARLING BROTHERS?

Yes, they are responsible for Codemasters' success **41%**
No, they were overrated and Codemasters will be fine **23%**
I prefer the Oliver Twins **36%**



GOODBYE TO ALL THAT

THE DARLING BROTHERS LEAVE CODEMASTERS

When the Darling brothers first set up Codemasters in 1986, little did they know that the company would go on to become one of the UK's biggest publishers.

Forming the new firm with money earned from selling games to Mastertronic, the Darling brothers quickly launched their own budget range and were soon riding high in the public eye thanks to hits like *BMX Simulator*, *Slightly Magic* and the Oliver Twins' *Dizzy* franchise.



The Game Genie could have destroyed Codemasters if the firm hadn't won the resulting legal battle with Nintendo.

While the brothers were very shrewd businessmen, they also weren't afraid to take risks. Sadly, the CD compilation that they released for various 8-bit computers wasn't as popular as they had hoped – mainly due to the disinterest in the formats at the time of the CD's release – but a collaboration with US firm Camerica proved extremely successful. Wanting to publish games on Nintendo's incredibly popular NES, but unable to secure a licence to do so, Codemasters created its own cartridge containing a bypass chip that enabled its games to run on the 8-bit console. Nintendo was far from happy, but the Aladdin Deck Enhancer was eventually crippled by low sales and the fact that many gamers were moving over to the SNES and Mega Drive. Codemasters' next run-in with Nintendo was when it created the Game Genie. The device allowed gamers to enter codes that would give them a variety of different abilities ranging from infinite lives to level skips. Nintendo was furious and took Codemasters to court for copyright infringement. The court battle that followed lasted for four long years, but Codemasters was eventually awarded £10 million pounds for loss of earnings.

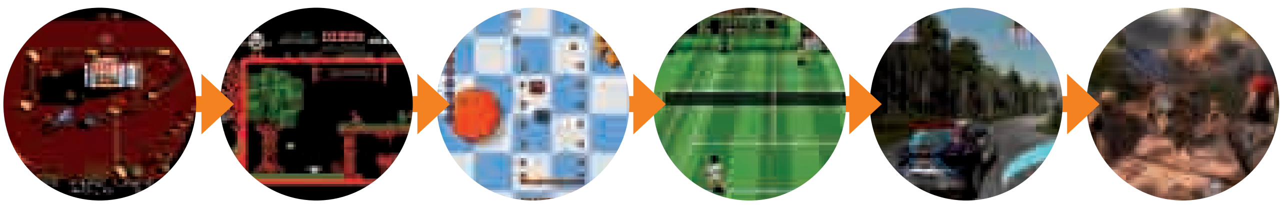
With the arrival of Sony's PlayStation Codemasters established itself with games like *Colin McRae Rally* and the *TOCA* series, both still popular today, while recent releases like *Overlord* and *Heat Seeker* have started to see the publisher favour originality over safe sequels.

The brothers have now sold their remaining stake in the firm to Balderton


The Darling brothers have come a long way since they first started making budget games for Mastertronic.

which already owned 70%. "Codemasters is now fully funded and ready for its next stage of growth with a great pipeline of new products and a world-class management in place," commented Ynon Kreiz, a general partner of Balderton Capital and a board member of Codemasters. "We are grateful for the contribution made by Jim, David and Richard and the key role they played to position the company for the future." There's no news yet as to what the Darling brothers' next move will be, but you can guarantee that it's not the last we'll be hearing from the talented siblings.

A BRIEF CODEMASTERS TIMELINE

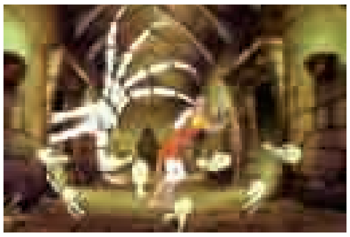


BMX SIMULATOR RELEASED **1986**
DIZZY RELEASED **1987**
MICRO MACHINES RELEASED **1991**
PETE SAMPRAS TENNIS RELEASED **1994**
COLIN MCRAE 2.0 RELEASED **2001**
OVERLORD RELEASED **2007**

DOUBLE DRAGON

DRAGON'S LAIR HEADS TO NINTENDO'S DS

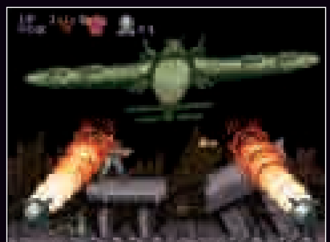
Considering how many gamers constantly mock Cinematronics' *Dragon's Lair* it certainly remains popular. After covering the LaserDisc classic in a recent Conversion Capers and revealing that it was heading to Blu-ray, we thought that would be it for the 24-year-old franchise. Eager to prove us wrong, Digital Leisure has now revealed that the venerable series will be heading to Nintendo's DS. A dual screen mode (you hold the DS like a book), touch-screen support, arcade and home modes and voice recognition are just a few of the extras you can expect and there are even plans to feature rumble support. No news when it's due to appear, but if it sells well it's quite possible that we'll see more LaserDisc classics popping up on Nintendo's ever popular handheld.


We're intrigued as to how *Dragon's Lair* will work on the DS. Voice control could be fun or terrible.

CONTRA-VERSY

WILL A BRAND NEW CONTRA TITLE GET THE SERIES BACK ON TRACK?

Despite the fact that seven titles have been released since *Contra III (below)* on the SNES, Konami has only recently announced *Contra 4*.

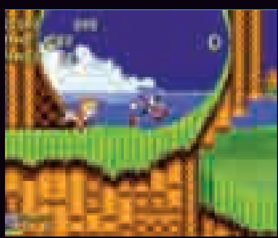


Confused? So were we. But from the early screenshots, it already looks as if this brand new DS offering will make up for the awful *Neo Contra* and the impossibly hard *Contra: Shattered Soldier*, both for the PlayStation 2.

Few details have been revealed so far, but it's obvious that WayForward Technologies, the developer to which Konami has entrusted its 20-year-old franchise, is taking its responsibility seriously and is delivering a surprisingly authentic-looking *Contra*. Let's just hope that the all-important gameplay is going to be included as well.

SONIC GETS SERIOUS

SEGA AND BIOWARE JOIN FORCES TO CREATE FIRST SONIC RPG



If you thought the prospect of Sonic and Mario teaming up for an Olympics sports game was as crazy as it got, wait until you hear about the blue hero's next little project. No doubt wanting to gain some credibility back after its atrociously bad next-gen update, Sega has now convinced Bioware to make an RPG for its company mascot to star in.

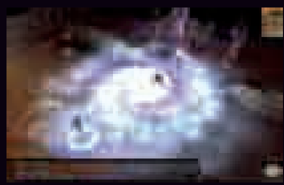
Now while this sounds as ludicrous as a slipper-wearing hedgehog teaming up with a portly plumber, we're actually quite excited about this new announcement, mainly because of Bioware's superb pedigree in the genre. Indeed, since the company's first RPG was released (*Baldur's Gate* in case you were wondering) it's barely set a foot wrong and managed to re-ignite both the *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Star Wars* licences to great effect.

SONIC'S NEW GAME?

AS SEGA IS REMAINING TIGHT-LIPPED ABOUT THE GAME'S ACTUAL CONTENT WE'VE COME UP WITH OUR OWN SCENARIOS BASED ON PAST BIOWARE'S TITLES.



BALDUR'S GATE
Sonic's plans of racing around the Forgotten Realms doing good deeds is soon scuppered when he's placed in a heavy suit of armour – thus nullifying his ability to move fast.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
The extensive character development in this RPG means that it is possible to create a Sonic Wizard and give him a natty red wizard's hat to match his trendy red slippers.



STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
Sonic, Tails, Knuckles and Big the Cat wield lightsabers and attempt to destroy Dr Robotnik who takes over the role played by Darth Malak after he beats him in an arm-wrestling contest.



JADE EMPIRE
Sonic's appearance proves controversial when it's revealed that he has a romantic relationship with Knuckles. Fortunately, no Hedgehog on Echidna action is actually seen.

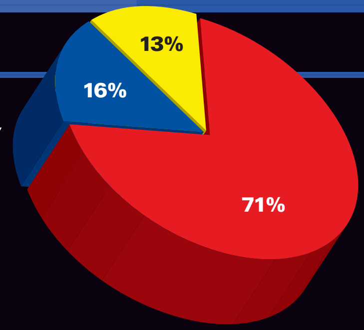
» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

RETRORADAR

HOT TOPICS

DO YOU WANT ANOTHER MONKEY ISLAND GAME?

Oh God yes **71%**
No, never liked it **16%**
Couldn't care less **13%**



THE retro GAMER OPINION

"While a further adventure starring Guybrush Threepwood has me gagging with excitement, I can't help but wonder if LucasArts will do the series justice. *Monkey Island IV* was terribly disappointing and if this is just to cash in on the success of *Pirates Of The Caribbean* I'll be absolutely gutted."


Darran jones

"*Monkey Island* certainly has the gaming pedigree to exist today. I hope LucasArts leaves the point and click style behind and transposes the vibrant characters and game world into a new 3D environment. Only then will *Monkey Island* truly move on, and recapture the magic of old."


Mike Tooley

"A new *Monkey Island* adventure would be my most wanted game, without a doubt. I just love the series – *Monkey 1* is possibly my favourite game ever – so I'd buy just about anything starring Guybrush. I'll be raising a flaming glass of grog if LucasArts makes it so."


Martyn Carroll

"I'd like to see another *Monkey Island* game to put right the abomination that was *MI4*. The essence of the first two games is the gaming comfort blanket we yearn for again, so a return to 2D graphics and the atmosphere of the original would help appease gamers disappointed by the last offering."


Richard Burton

THE GALLERY

CLASSIC ADVERTS TO STIMULATE THE NOSTALGIA GLAND: THIS MONTH, KONAMI KEEPS IT REAL



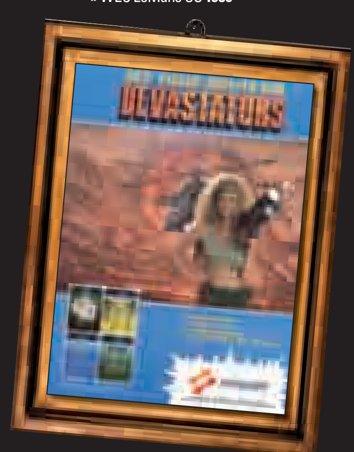
» Aliens US **1990**



» WEC LeMans US **1986**


» Haunted Castle US **1988**


» Rush 'N Attack US **1985**



» Devastators US **1988**


» Crime Fighters US **1989**

MONKEY MAGIC

COULD THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND BE RETURNING?


» How LeChuck looks in the concept art. Note the dead crow that makes up his hat.

While it's only at the rumour stage at the moment, it's already sounding highly likely that a fifth instalment of LucasArts' popular pirate franchise could soon be on the way.

While news of a fifth game has been circulating for a while, speculation reached fever point when the popular *Monkey Island* fansite, World of Monkey Island received an email from Steve Purcell which contained some gorgeous concept art for a project that was "in no way connected to any existing or cancelled piratey project".

While Jim Ward, president of LEC is strongly against reworking old franchises – with the exception of *Star Wars*, *Thrillville* and *Indiana Jones* – and adventure games, there can be no denying the huge popularity of the *Pirates Of The Caribbean* films that have dominated cinemas. Then there's the fact that the recent *Sam & Max* episodes have proven extremely popular and are further proof that the genre can survive if it's handled properly.

World of Monkey Island recently mentioned that a 'reliable source' had informed them that the pictures that were submitted by Purcell were concept art from a cancelled *Monkey Island* film that was first pitched in 2000, but that doesn't really explain why it's taken seven years for the pictures to finally surface.

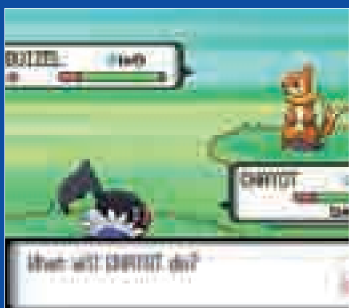
There's still a huge fanbase for *Monkey Island*, and it could be somewhat premature if LucasArts was to completely write the series off without exploring potential new directions for the well-loved franchise – providing, of course, that it doesn't try and turn it into another *Pirates Of The Caribbean* sword slasher. We can just about stomach another 3D iteration, but we'll walk the plank and jump into shark-infested seas before we play a *Monkey Island* game that isn't a proper adventure.

Retro Gamer Diary

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

EVENT HOSTING Retro Gamer
IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because Retro Gamer looks to the past, that doesn't mean there aren't games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



JULY 07

POKÉMON DIAMOND/ PEARL

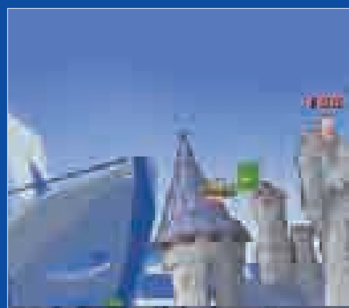
Released: 27 July

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

It's one of the most commercially successful videogame franchises of all time, so it's little wonder that those lovable Pokémon are appearing in two brand new DS games. Yes, the format has stayed pretty much identical since the release of *Pokémon Red* and *Blue*, but the ability to play other fans online is not to be sniffed at.



AUGUST 07

WORMS: OPEN WARFARE 2

Released: August

Publisher: THQ

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP, DS

Worms Open Warfare was superb fun on the PSP, but somewhat lacking on the DS. This time, though, that's all set to change, as all the little flaws that appeared in the DS outing now appear to have been fixed. Set over a variety of different time periods and with some superb visuals, *Open Warfare 2* promises to be very special indeed.



AUGUST 07

RETRO NORTH

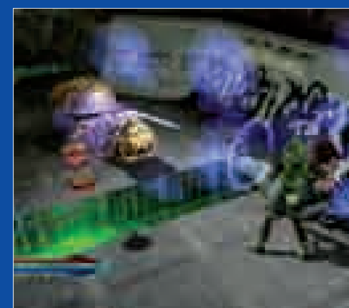
Opens: 25 August

Location: Glossop Rugby Union Football Club, Glossop

Entry: £9 per person

Website: www.retronorth.co.uk

With no Retro Fusion currently planned, retro fans are going to have to head to Glossop and enjoy Retro North instead. Organised by Keith Lutener, Retro North is promising celebrities in the form of the Pickford brothers, plenty of competitions to take part in and a variety of different consoles and computers to play on. Oh and beer, lots of beer…



AUGUST

ALIEN SYNDROME

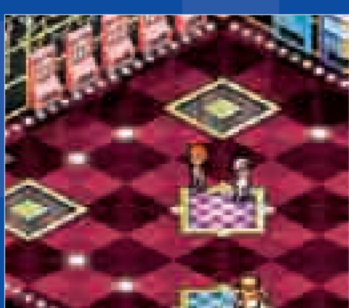
Released: 31 August

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

It may be one of Sega's more obscure coin-ops, but we're actually looking forward to *Alien Syndrome*. While the original was basically a sci-fi take on *Gauntlet*, the PS2 update that was released under the Sega Ages banner was a rip-roaring blaster. Early reports suggest that this new update will feature a similar blend of aliens, gunplay and slime. We can't wait.



AUGUST 07

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS

Released: 31 August

Publisher: Atari

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

We're hoping that the reason for *Card Fighters'* lengthy delay is because SNK Playmore is making sure that the game-crippling bug that appears in the US version is going to be taken out. While it's not as good as the original Neo-Geo Pocket title, it's not quite as bad as many have been making out. Expect the definitive review when we cover it in a few issues' time.



OCTOBER 07

SONIC RUSH ADVENTURE

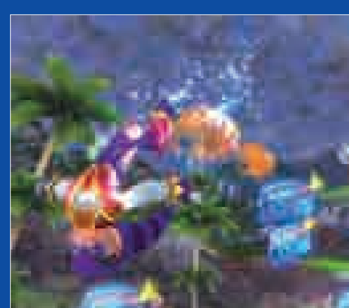
Released: October

Publisher: Sega

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

The original *Sonic Rush* turned out to be a brilliant little platformer on the DS, so we're hoping that Sega will be able to work similar magic with this sequel. While early screenshots look rather promising, we can't say that we're too excited about the fact that Sonic will now be able to use a hang-glider to complete certain levels. Sonic works best when he's racing through levels using just his feet, not transport.



NOVEMBER 07

NiGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS

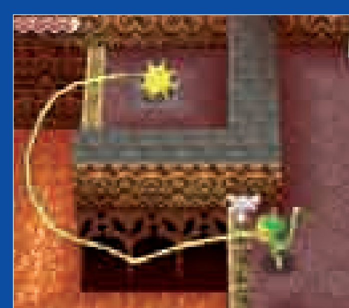
Released: November

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

Ever since Sega revealed it was working on a new *NiGHTS* game we've been prancing about like love-sick teenagers. The original Saturn game was a superb title that never reached the audience it deserved, so hopes are high that the high install base for the Wii will more than make up this. We've not had a chance to play it yet, but once we do you'll know all about it. We can't wait!



DECEMBER 07

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Released: December

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

One of our most anticipated DS titles has slipped to December. While *Phantom Hourglass* features a similar graphical style to *The Wind Waker*, it's set to make full use of the DS's unique abilities, allowing for some competitive play against another DS owner. With everything from Link's movement to combat being controlled by the stylus, this could well be the most distinctive *Zelda* yet.

HOME-BREW RATED

CRONOSOFT PULLS AN ACTION-ADVENTURE GAME OUT OF THE BAG – AND THEN INDULGES IN A SPOT OF GARDENING

STRONGHOLD

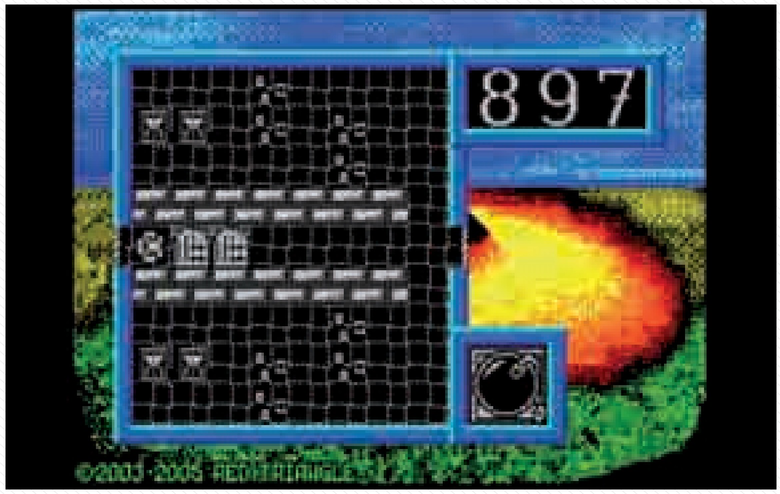
A RUSSIAN GAME AND NOT AN L-SHAPED BLOCK IN SIGHT

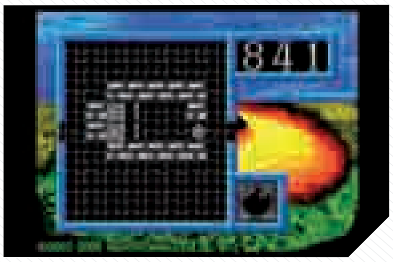
FORMAT: SPECTRUM
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: RED TRIANGLE
PUBLISHED BY: CRONOSOFT
LINK: WWW.CRONOSOFT.CO.UK
PRICE: £2.99 CASSETTE, £1.75 EMULATOR IMAGE
REVIEWED BY: DAVID CROOKES



S*tronghold* proves there's more to Russian games than *Tetris*. Beautifully presented and stunningly executed, this adventure puzzler has everything you'd expect. Keys which unlock doors? Check. Teleports? Check. Items which kill the enemy? Check. But Red Triangle carries it off with style, its monochrome main playing area featuring well-animated sprites and framed by a colourful background. Never mind the silly plot about a mysterious warlock: what is important is that the game itself rarely stumbles.

The learning curve is near-perfect, although with one life you don't want to take too many chances. You find a key and there's a door in the next room. You collect a tube and a gargoyle to kill isn't too far away (although you may find killing your first two requires some thought). As you progress, however, you have to use your head even more and you'll soon be praying for more scrolls with which to mass kill the gargoyles, or for an hourglass which boosts your time limit – unfortunately, there also are some hourglasses which reduce it.





» Rather dramatic – basically, you're dead!

Once you've left a room, you can't return. At first this is a tad annoying, particularly when you're just getting to grips with the game and think you can leave a few things behind. But you realise this raises the difficulty levels and poses a greater challenge.

But is it worth the money? Definitely. You won't be disappointed.

RATING: 82%

QUANTUM GARDENING

HOW DO YOU MAKE YOUR GARDEN GROW? ROLL THE DICE

retro GAMER SIZZLER

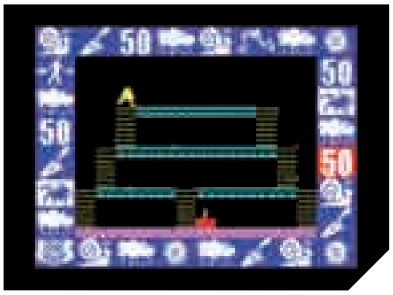
FORMAT: SPECTRUM
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: JONATHAN CAULDWELL
PUBLISHED BY: CRONOSOFT
LINK: WWW.CRONOSOFT.CO.UK
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: DAVID CROOKES



It sure sounds confusing on paper: Jonathan Cauldwell's latest madcap game is set amidst a garden containing a solitary tulip, with killer borlotti beans running amok and a chap called Eadwig eager to water his plant.

But wait, don't go. Whatever you may be thinking, there's no denying that this is a slice of genius, an unapologetic nut-job of a game which initially has you baffled but later craving for more.

Cauldwell is a true master of programming, a cauldron of ideas manufacturing beautifully executed games with incredible depth. Weaving together a simple platformer with some board-game action, he brings in an element of the unknown. When you feel you've just about got a level nailed, a throw of the dice sends the whole thing into disarray.

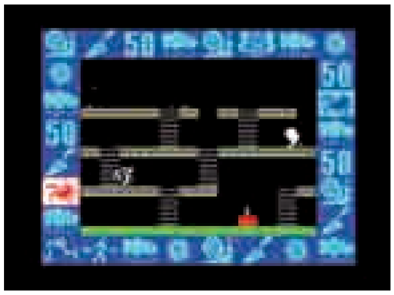


» You've got to make sure the rain falls on your plant.

To play the game, you work your way around a single screen, adding and removing platforms so that any rainfall will make its way to Eadwig's plant, all the while attempting to avoid the running beans. But it is the dice which dictate the way the game plays, the actions being dictated by numbers, adding a randomness to proceedings.

This is where strategy takes hold. You may land on a rain square, in which case your plant can start to grow. Or you may be directed to a spider square which removes the pesky bees that fly around adding or removing platforms at random, usually to the detriment of what you're trying to achieve.

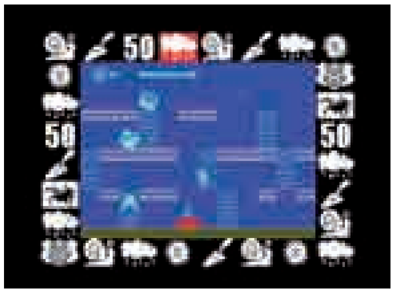
Whatever happens, the dice are crucial, dictating the play of the game. You can plan ahead, working out which numbered die you need – although sometimes one drops on your head and accidentally forces a change.



» Those damn bees can be eliminated with a throw of the dice.

Cauldwell may not have gone overboard on the graphics and sound, but there's no doubting that this is entertainment pure and simple. Get it!

RATING 90%



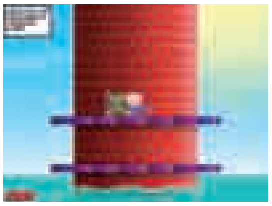
» A couple of dice await – care to throw them?

A RETRO MASH-UP FROM ATHLETIC DESIGN AND AN ATARI CLASSIC FROM ROB BAKER...

LIGHTHOUSE LUNACY

IT'S NOT SO FUNNY WHEN YOU HAVE TO KEEP CLICKING

FORMAT: PC
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: ATHLETIC DESIGN
LINK: WWW.LIGHTHOUSELUNACY.COM
PRICE: $19.95
REVIEWED BY: DAVID CROOKES

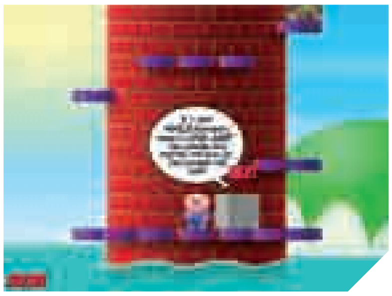


Game designer Anders Hansson says, "We keep our games lean and clean. By cutting them down to their bare essentials, we make games that are to the point."

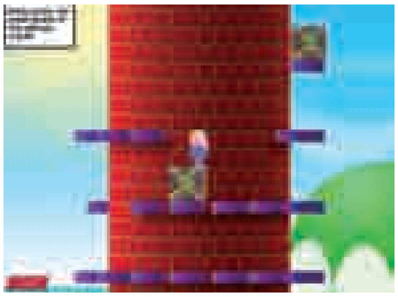
Anders is discussing *Lighthouse Lunacy*, Athletic Design's new retro-style game which mixes elements of *Sokoban* and *Nebulus* with a bit of 2D jumping. Given that comment, it's shame that the game is weighed down by attempts to be funny, because strip the humour away and you've got a smart slice of nostalgia to enjoy.

As with *Sokoban*, the classic puzzle game created by Hiroyuki Imabayashi, the main aim is to push boxes into designated locations. You can only move one at a time and you cannot pull them.

But with *Lighthouse Lunacy*, the game takes place in a vertical, *Nebulus*-style environment (a lighthouse no less) hosted by a cartoon character called Fred. It is Fred who takes side-swipes at the developers – calling them lazy for being unable to draw hair one minute, berating them for ripping off a 26-year-old game the next, the chatter being played out in a series of speech bubbles.



» Fred ponders what to do – one of many speech bubbles to cycle through.



» Still, the game is very playable. Here you have to push the boxes down to the ground floor.



» Look stern… have a think.

It raises a smile, of that there is no doubt. But the constant clicking needed to cycle through the patter before you can actually get on with playing each level slows down the game as a whole.

And that slightly spoils an otherwise joyous game which excels in its presentation, graphics, sound and gameplay. The levels are finely tuned and well thought out, being at once frustrating and moreish. What's more, it's hard not to like this game and no matter the temptation to dismiss it as an expensive(ish) retro mash-up, it's one of those titles you'll play and play and play.

And if that hasn't convinced you, then why not try out the free taster version that's available on the web?

RATING: 77%

ULTRA

A TEMPEST TO BLOW YOU AWAY

FORMAT: PC
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: ROB BAKER
LINK: WWW.ULTRATHEGAME.COM
PRICE: $10
REVIEWED BY: DAVID CROOKES



retro GAMER SIZZLER

***Ultra* is essentially a remake of *Tempest*, the Atari arcade game that was designed and programmed by David Theurer back in 1981. And while there have been a fair few versions of this classic souped-up *Space Invaders* title over the years, *Ultra* goes well beyond a rejigging of the game, throwing the gamer into a lush environment while still remaining faithful to the original.**

Zipping around in the polished, visually arresting world created by Rob Baker is a dream, the care taken over this game leaping from the screen with every glow of the enemy.

Using the mouse to control your spaceship makes the game easy to get to grips with. You have a choice of difficulty level, ranging from 'I'm too young to die' to 'ultra violent'. Each gives you a satisfying feeling as you clear the screen of enemies, watching as they explode impressively in a spectrum of light.

To keep things interesting, various improvements are made to your weaponry as you progress through the game, boosting your firepower for greater kills. Without them you'd be left floundering, flicking your mouse from side to side as the waves of enemies advance, the flippers locking on to your ship and costing you a life.

It's handy, then, that there's a feature enabling to save your game. You'll want to keep your progress safe and, besides, play too much of this at once and you'll probably frazzle your brain.

It's games like *Ultra* which show the sheer strength of the home-brew scene and this is a must-have title.

RATING: 92%



» Explosions and packed with action.



» The fast pace of *Ultra* will stun you.

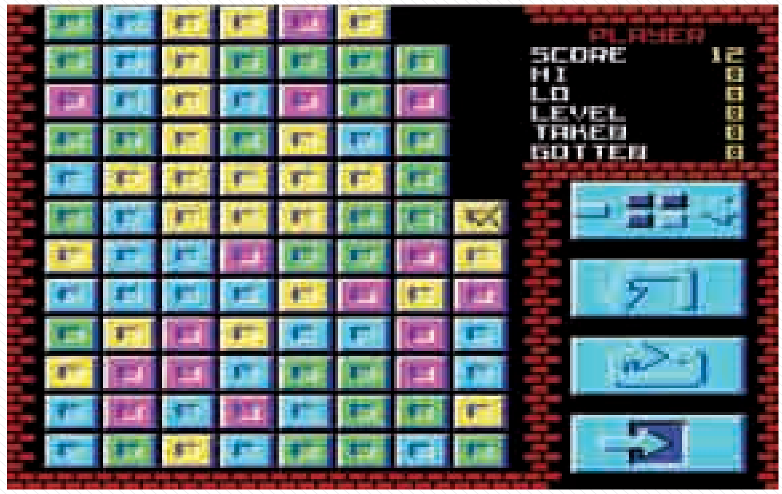


» One of the best remakes we've seen.

PUZZLE TIME: BRICKOUT IS ALREADY LOOKING SPECIAL DESPITE NOT BEING FINISHED, AND GROOPS WILL EAT AWAY AT YOUR TIME

BRICKOUT

NOT COMPLETE BUT, JEEZ, IT'S GOOD



Think of this as more of a preview. You may be able to download the game on the Prollcoder website but it's only 95% finished and the programmers say they are still working on getting it exactly right.

Let's hope they do, for this is an important C64 release: a puzzle game that is fiendishly addictive to the point where people are already gripped by it (it came fourth in the C64 32K game competition at Breakpoint 2007).

It's a shame that there are still a few bugs – the game wouldn't start on a couple of emulators – but once it got going, it was worth the hassle.

Like most puzzle games, the task is simple. All you need to do is eliminate bricks in a wall. They can be turned upside down or switched – with the leftmost column becoming the rightmost, for instance.

Production values are also high. It looks and plays like a professional title with a great tune filling your ears when the game loads When the full 100% version of this game arrives, you can sure of a second review. According to the authors, that's not going to be too far off.

But we decided to give this the once-over now because of the buzz surrounding it and because so many people are currently competing to get a high score. It's only fair you should join in the fun.

FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: PROLLCODER
LINK: WWW.PROLLCODER.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: DAVID CROOKES





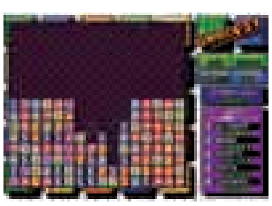
» Here's the reward for clearing the hard setting.

RATING: N/A

GROOPS

TILE MATCHING CAN BE FUN

FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
WRITTEN BY: BINARY SCIENCES
LINK: WWW.BINARYSCIENCES.COM
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: DAVID CROOKES



There's a distinctly *Tetris* drift to this riveting puzzler, but with one major difference: all of the blocks are given to you right at the start.

With *Groops*, the aim is to attain the biggest score you can. You do this by identifying any matching tiles in groups of more than two before blowing them up. This leaves a gap, into which the tiles above will fall and sometimes this results in another group of more than two matching tiles.

The player simply goes through the board until either the screen is cleared – a difficult task, for sure – or you end up with lots of individual blocks which cannot be paired up and evaporated.

At first, the game is rather dull, but the more you play, the more you realise the extent of the challenge. You begin to plan ahead, working out the effect of the moves you make on the overall game. And with big points to be had for blowing up large groups of matching tiles, there's always something to strive for.

The beauty of the presentation in this colourful game is worth pointing out. But it's the modes of play which are most important, with a choice of normal, fast (giving you half the number of tiles but making scoring more difficult) and challenge (presenting you with one of 16 screens that are accessed when you achieve a particular score) to keep you hooked.

RATING 86%



» One of the 16 challenge levels.



» Work your way through this little lot.

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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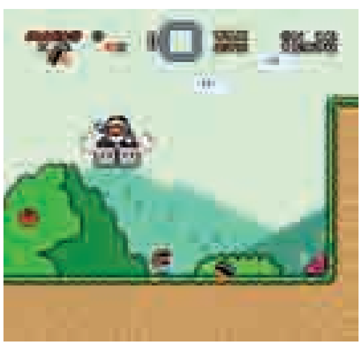
STAR LETTER!

FULL CIRCLE

Dear Retro Gamer,
Normally I wouldn't have any interest in current-generation machines, but I've found myself recently buying both an Xbox 360 and a Nintendo Wii (I can't afford a PlayStation 3). Although I can't say I'm too impressed with the majority of games that are available on both systems – the Wii's library is pretty bare, while the 360's consists of first-person shooters – I am very impressed with their online services. The ability to download classics like *Pac-Man*, *Super Mario World*, *Double Dragon*, *Donkey Kong Country* and *F-Zero* is a stroke of genius and the releases just keep getting better and better. Plenty of my friends and family are more than happy to play *Mario Kart 64* and some of them have even gone so far as to buy the original machines so they can experience the games as they were originally intended.

I think this is a great shot in the arm for our hobby and I'm sure retro gaming is just going to get bigger and bigger as more people are introduced to these classic games.
Andrew Butler, via email

You're right Andrew, the new machines are really helping to raise awareness of our favourite hobby. It's too early to say just how much of an impact these titles are having (both Microsoft and Nintendo rarely publish figures for the services) but rumours suggest that Street Fighter II *on Xbox Live has had over 1 million downloads, which is mighty impressive.*





» Download services like Xbox Live Arcade and the Virtual Console are ensuring that the masses play retro games.

REDESIGN? WHAT REDESIGN?

Dear Retro Gamer,
Just a quick line to say what happened to the relaunch? I remember reading your editorial a few months back now and was looking forward to the promised new design but it never materialised. Is it still in the works or has it disappeared for good?
Yours questioningly, Paul Topping via email

Don't worry Paul, the redesign is still on the way, it's just that we don't want to get behind it fully until there's a new staff writer on board. Expect this to change very, very soon.



EVERY MONTH ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy Retro Gamer T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new Retro Gamer binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls; failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

BIBLE BLUES

Dear Retro Gamer,
While I'm a huge fan of the magazine, I'd love to see a few more genre specific articles in the magazine each month. Your sister magazine gamesTM does a bi-monthly Bible Guide that takes an extensive look at a different genre and has covered everything from the first-person shooter to the humble beat-'em-up. It's a brilliant and interesting read, and it seems perfectly suited to Retro Gamer (with some added touches of Retro Gamer brilliance of course).

I'm a huge fan of racing games and shoot-'em-ups and I'd greatly appreciate an article that followed the evolution of these genres and highlighted all the important games and what they brought to the genre in question and I'm sure other readers would like it as well. For example, you could have a pictorial based feature showing titles like *Space Invaders*, *Galaxian*, *Defender*, *Gradius* and *R-Type* with text underneath showing what they did first. It would be really informative and, with all the pictures, could prove to be a huge nostalgia rush.

Sorry for going on, but I really feel that this could be a fantastic addition to the mag, especially if somewhat like Stuart Campbell put it together.
Steve Taylor, Warminster

That's a really good idea Steve, and would be an interesting take on gamesTM's Bible series. Whilst some readers may not like the minimalist approach you've suggested, it would ensure that all the bases would be properly covered. We'll definitely consider this for the redesign.



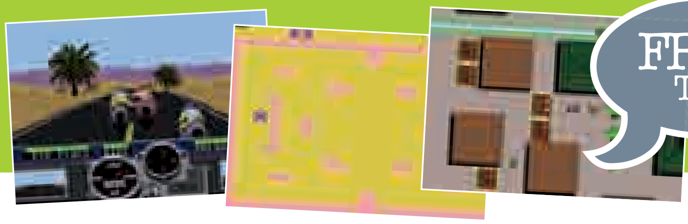
» Steve Taylor wants to see features that take an in-depth look at the evolution of popular genres.

TEN OF THE BEST?

Dear Darran,
I've just been reading issue 39 and while I loved Ashley Day's superb Amiga feature, I can't say that I'm too happy with the top ten choices that have been selected by the Retro Gamer team.

Granted, the likes of *Worms*, *Another World* and *The Secret Of Monkey Island* deserve to be there, but where are the classics like *It Came From The Desert*, *Zool*, *Cannon Fodder* and *Xenon 2*?

The list has some very dubious choices in there and I can't understand why you've included the likes of *Sensible Soccer*, *Lemmings* and *Alien Storm* when they all



FROM THE FORUM

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW: WHAT WAS THE FIRST GAME YOU EVER BOUGHT?

ID: Antiriad2097
Xenon-1 for the Oric-1. A classy little shooter that riffed on several big arcade titles including standard alien shooting, avoiding meteors, docking for fuel and battle the mothership levels. Still very playable though I've lost my edge.

ID: yakmag
Hungry Horace for the C64… Please take pity on me… It was early 1983 and I was only 13!!

ID: markopoloman
Orbitron by Mastertronic on the C64. It was Boxing Day and I'd suffered the whole of Christmas day without any games for my nice new C64! Imagine the shock when I loaded it up!!

ID: Opa-Opa
Frogger on the VIC-20, Boxing Day 198-something… What a great day…

ID: Morkin
Hunchback on the Spectrum. Even now the thought of playing that game brings me out in a sweat.

ID: HardcoreOtaku
Daley Thompson's Supertest – Spectrum 128K.
That's the cue for a synonymous *DTST* innuendo – yes, I broke my joystick from over-waggling it.

ID: OriginalJax
I didn't buy 'one' game, per se – I was strapped for cash and thought buying a compilation called '30 Games' would be a bargain. Aside from the excellent *Taskset* games, was I ever wrong.

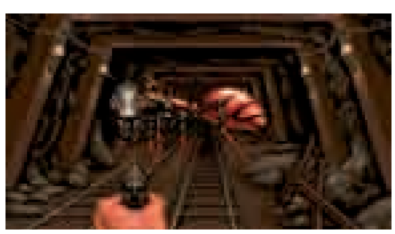
ID: Xesh
The first game that I bought wasn't for a computer. It was a Grandstand Astro Wars tabletop game (the one with LEDs).

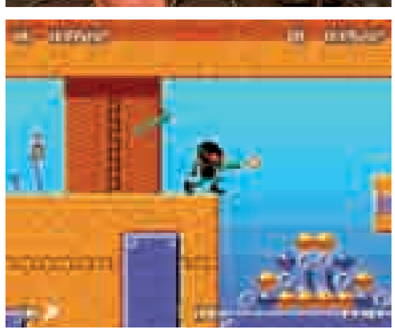
ID: Limbrooke
I'm pretty confident the first I bought was *Sword Of The Samurai* for MS-DOS. Followed soon after by *Jurassic Park* on Genesis if not the other way around.

had superior sequels, which all appeared on the Amiga.

If this is your definitive idea of the best ten Amiga games that were ever released then I feel you need to play a few more games, as Commodore's machine had so much more to offer.
Brian James, via email

To be fair Brian, we've never ever stated that these lists were the definitive games for each system; they just happen to be some of our favourite titles. Even the intro for the Amiga Top Ten states how hard it is to just select ten games when there are so many classic titles to choose from. Remember, it's just an opinion, so you shouldn't take it to heart. If you're still aggrieved about the choices, why not head to the forums and see if anyone else shares your opinion?



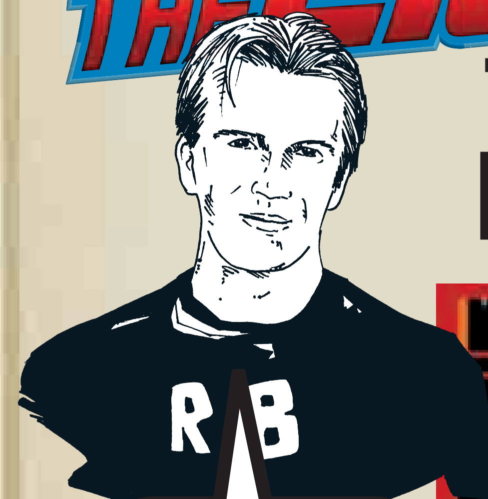


» *It Came From The Desert* and *Zool*. Just two of the titles Brian James felt should have been in our Amiga Top Ten.

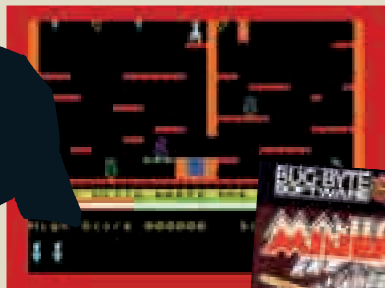
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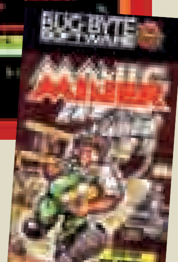
BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 1983



It's summer and it's August 1983 – the NewBrain is old news, Sir Clive's Microdrives arrive, half a million Spectrums on the loose, Smurfs, a Flan from Elan and Manic Miner. Can you dig it? Richard Burton takes his pick…





» *Manic Miner* (Spectrum): 20 caverns, mutant telephones, skating penguins, amoebatrons and the deadly Solar Powered Generator. That's heaven, that is…

The NewBrain computer, a relative newbie on the computing front, having only been available for around four months, was set to disappear as quickly as it came. Its manufacturer, Grundy Business Systems, went into liquidation, citing a lack of money as the primary cause of the firm's premature demise.

The NewBrain computer itself never really set the world on fire, seemingly being contented to be one of the smouldering makeweights in the computing/gaming scene. The machine was designed by one Sir Clive Sinclair, so let us be thankful it didn't turn out to be the first Spectrum.

Mirror Group Newspapers announced that it had plans to enter the software market. Initially it would be looking to commission existing publishers and software houses to produce titles for its software arm, Mirrorsoft, although it would later hope to produce software from within its own development team.

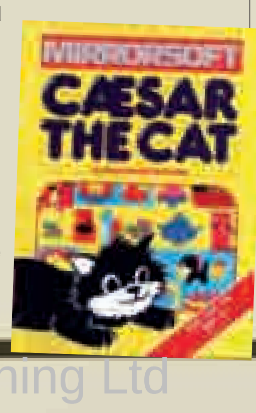
Mirrorsoft initially built up its catalogue with a swathe of educational titles such as *Caesar The Cat* and *First Step With The Mr Men*, but later branched out into popular gaming territory, creating a classic or two along the way including the truly superb *Dynamite Dan*.

There were two pieces of extremely good news for Sinclair Research that came out during August. The Spectrum, both 16K and 48K, had sold over 500,000 since its launch. An impressive quantity by any standard, and particularly so when you consider how many new computer models had been entering the market during 1983. With apparent ease, the Spectrum has conquered all newcomers to the market and watched a fair few fall by the wayside in the process.

And to add to Sir Clive's summer celebrations, the Microdrive finally became available after a troubled and long-winded development process. Priced at £49.95 for each unit, of which you could network eight together, and a further £29.95 for the Interface 1, they were (at that time) a relatively cheap alternative to disk drive. Whether the Microdrive cartridges, priced at £4.95, would prove to be reliable, was something that would unfold over the coming months.

Although the first preview sightings of it had been observed in July, August was the month that finally saw the much-anticipated *Manic Miner* from Bug Byte available to buy. The initial reactions to the game were almost unanimous in proclaiming it as one of the best ever on the Spectrum. When you consider some of the gaming output the Spectrum received on a regular basis, including oodles of *Space Invaders* and *Frogger* clones, this probably wasn't such a difficult task.

Curiously, several magazines, when previewing it, noted that the platform game featured 16 caverns while the final released version contained 20. Maybe Matthew Smith managed to crowbar another four caverns into the game before it went into production? Whatever the case, *Manic Miner* and Mr Smith, the retro-gaming equivalent of Marmite, was selling games by the shed-load.



» Mirrorsoft's first foray into the world of software was with educational titles such as *Caesar The Cat*.

Psion and Sinclair released *Scrabble* for the Spectrum. Creating a classic word game on a Spectrum was pretty good; stuffing an 11,000 word vocabulary in there too was nothing short of amazing. The game was well received by all that reviewed it and although it boasted a hefty £15.95 price tag, initial sales were extremely promising. It later became one of the games bundled with future Spectrum hardware releases and can now be found in virtually every single eBay Spectrum games auction ever listed, ever, ever…

Those Liverpudlian spendthrifts running Imagine Software announced three further new arrivals ready for release from their programming teams. The Commodore 64, which was rapidly gaining in popularity, in no small part to a major reduction to its price this month, saw a conversion of the popular shoot-'em-up *Arcadia*. For the Spectrum there were two new titles: *Zip-Zap* and the very tasty-looking *Zzoom*, which involved shooting enemy planes and tanks whilst saving refugees, as opposed to slurping on a tri-coloured fruit-flavoured ice lolly.

Already out and adorning the shelves of John Menzies was *Jumping Jack*, a title with simplistic gameplay and even simpler graphics. Get your stick man from the bottom of the screen to the top and… er… that's it.



» *Scrabble* (Spectrum): Look in any loft, absolutely any loft, and you'll find one copy of *Scrabble* and one copy of *Make A Chip*…





» *Zzoom* was released by Imagine for the Spectrum. Zoom was released by Lyons Maid for hot days. Don't get the two confused.

There was confusion however, as Sumlock Software had already released a *Frogger* clone called *Jumpin' Jack* the previous year. Imagine and Sumlock, keen to avoid a spot of legal wrangling and unwarranted expense, came to an understanding regarding the similarity of the game names and an amicable result was reached. Sumlock would rename its future C64 and Atari conversions of *Jumpin' Jack* to *Leggit* whilst retaining the original name for the Vic-20 version. In the cutthroat world of software houses and games development, common sense had shockingly prevailed.

Gyruss, the tubular shoot-'em-up arcade game that made Julian Rignall the Video Arcade Game Champion for 1983, received its official release in August. If you're not familiar with the game, just pretend for a moment that *Tempest* and *Galaga* got together, got a bit saucy and had an illegitimate kid – that screaming newborn would be *Gyruss*.

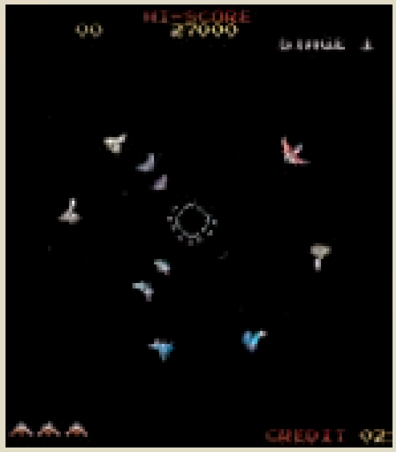
Gyruss can claim to hold a tiny portion of arcade gaming history in that it was the first arcade game to feature full stereo sound. The man behind *Gyruss*, Yoshiki Okamoto, is also credited for bringing us *1942* (the game not the year) and the *Street Fighter* series.

There was great news for those youngsters who had spent many an hour travelling with dad to the nearest National petrol station to fill up the old Ford Cortina Mk3 purely on the off-chance of getting another plastic Smurf from their latest petrol promotion. A new Colecovision game based on the little blue Belgian Smurfs had just hit the shops. Disappointingly there was no Father Abraham promotional false beard and flexidisc set.

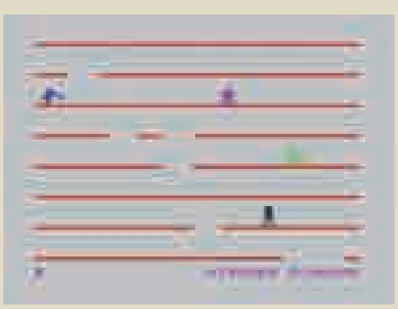
Smurf Rescue saw you running and jumping through colourful yet hazardous screens as well as clashing with bats and spiders en route to Gargamel's Castle to save Smurfette. Not a hard game by any stretch of the imagination, but it was presumably targeted at younger gamers.

After a quiet couple of months for new computers, the British company, Elan Computers, revealed it would launch its new system at the Great Home Computer Spectacular at Olympia in September – although it wouldn't be available to buy until early 1984. History goes on to show it was well into 1985 before it was actually readily available. Unfortunately by that time, the computing market had moved on and the similarly coloured Amstrad CPC464 had taken a large chunk of the Elan's prospective market. When it did eventually appear, the Elan computer was renamed the Enterprise although it had already had several names changes along the way including Samurai, Elan, Oscar and the tasty, yet uncomputery sounding, Flan.

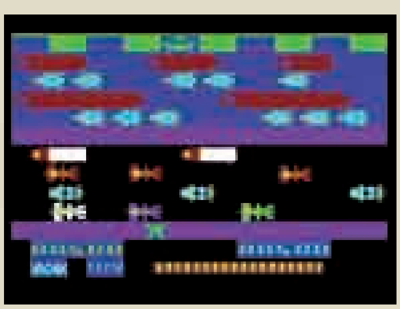
One old-timer trying to get a second wind was Atari with its 2600 console. Atari decided to lower the price of the machine by £20 to £69.99 and also added the *Pac-Man* game cartridge for free, which normally retailed at £29.99. Although



» *Gyruss* (Arcade): Newly released, this often overlooked arcade classic combines elements of *Tempest* and *Galaga*, all with stereo sound. Groovy.

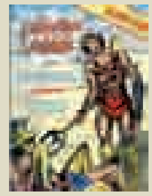


» *Jumping Jack* (Spectrum): Imagine's new release was an exceedingly simple game with even simpler graphics. It played really well though.



» *Jumpin' Jack* (Vic-20): Sumlock's *Jumpin' Jack* was released before Imagine's *Jumping Jack*. Thankfully a compromise was reached rather than legal action.

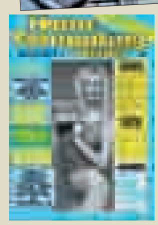
WHAT THE MAGAZINES WERE SAYING...



Computer & Video Games

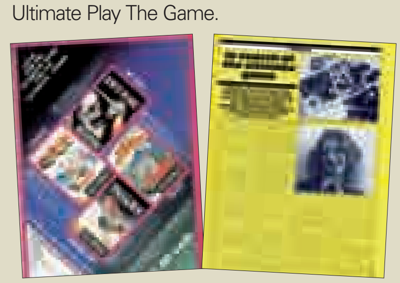
The C&VG cover featured a strange-faced gladiator, highlighting yet another type-in listing that the magazine seemed so fond of at the time. Inside, there was news on Imagine's new games, emphasised by the double-page adverts Imagine had splashed across this and every other periodical with even the vaguest whiff of computing in it.

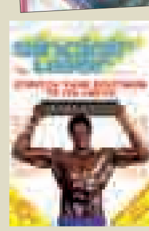




Home Computing Weekly

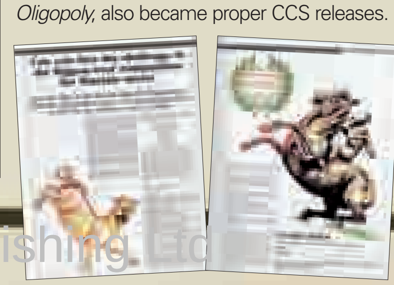
HCW adorned its cover with a bikini-clad blonde girl (again) holding a ZX81. It had no connection to anything in its pages and was there purely for ogle factor. Good work. Inside was a rare early interview with the usually impenetrable software house, Ultimate Play The Game.





Sinclair User

Inside, there was the announcement of the Cambridge Award, sponsored by software house CCS, to find the best home-made game of 1983. The winner would get £1,000 and have their game marketed by CCS. The winning game was *Battle 1917*. Strangely, second- and third-placed games, *War 70* and *Oligopoly*, also became proper CCS releases.



CHARTS

AUGUST 1983

VIC-20



1. Arcadia (Imagine)
2. Cosmiads (Bug Byte)
3. Skyhawk (Quicksilva)
4. Escape MCP (Rabbit Software)
5. Panic (Bug Byte)

SPECTRUM



1. Jet Pac (Ultimate)
2. Manic Miner (Bug Byte)
3. Transylvanian Tower (Richard Shepherd)
4. Tranz Am (Ultimate)
5. Horace And The Spiders (Melbourne House)

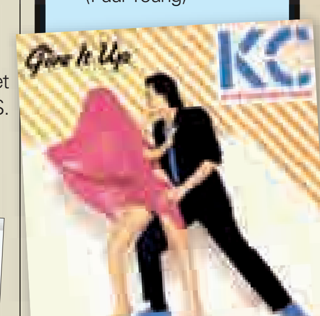
DRAGON 32



1. Nightflight (Salamander)
2. Space Wars (Microdeal)
3. Frogger (Microdeal)
4. Dragon Trek (Wintersoft)
5. Cuthbert Goes Walkabout (Microdeal)

MUSIC SINGLES CHART AUGUST '83

1. Give It Up (KC And The Sunshine Band)
2. Club Tropicana (Wham!)
3. Double Dutch (Malcolm McLaren)
4. I.O.U. (Freeez)
5. Wherever I Lay My Hat (Paul Young)



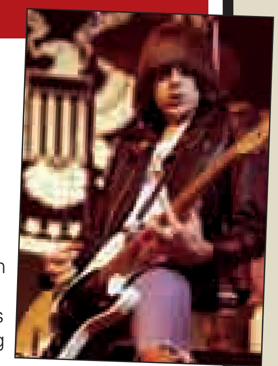




» *Smurf Rescue* (Colecovision): You (a Smurf) have to rescue the kidnapped Smurfette. What happens after that is up to your filthy imagination…

NEWS

AUGUST 1983

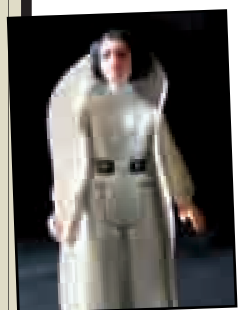


15 August saw guitarist Johnny Ramone (real name John Cummings), of the punk band The Ramones, receive serious head injuries during a street brawl. Johnny suffered a fractured skull during a fight with another musician whom he had seen with an ex-girlfriend. He was admitted to a New York hospital where he underwent surgery. He later made a full recovery.

Another musician hitting the headlines was Paul Simon, who on 16 August married Princess Leia. Carrie Fisher had been dating him on and off for a few years but they finally tied the knot during the Simon & Garfunkel World Tour. The marriage lasted just 11 months with Fisher's notorious drug problems being one of the contributing factors to the short-lived wedlock.

30 August saw Guion S Bluford become the first African-American astronaut in space when he was part of the crew for the eighth Space Shuttle mission aboard Challenger. It was also the first shuttle mission to take off during the night. In total, Mr Bluford spent 688 hours in space – which is almost as long as it takes to attain 'Deadly' status in the space trading game *Elite*.

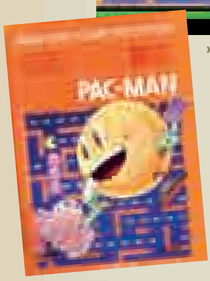
Two films premiering in the USA this month, both of which were substandard fare in their respective series, were *Smokey And The Bandit III* and *The Curse Of The Pink Panther*. Oh man, something stinks around here and it ain't my special haddock skin underpants…



» Paul Simon's wife-to-be arrived at the church in a wedding gown he was sure he had seen somewhere before…

the Atari 2600 was showing its age, games developers were still producing software for it on a regular basis and none more so than Activision. The latter had three new titles ready for release for the wood-grained beast. *Oink*, *Plaque Attack* and *Keystone Kapers* would be available during August at £29.99 each.





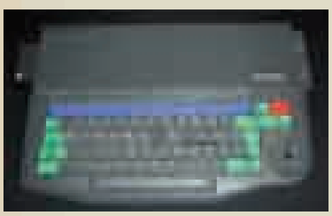
» *Pac-Man* (Atari 2600): Find a big hole in New Mexico and treat yourself to 5 million of these (plus free concrete).

There was also great news for Oric owners looking for a bit of quality adventuring – *The Hobbit* by Melbourne House made the leap from the mainstream machines onto the Oric-1.

With summer here and ice cream, sandy sandwiches and bikinis on the agenda, games were a little thin on the ground with the big companies saving their good stuff for the impending Christmas sales push. However, some choice gaming cuts were to be had and the magazines needed little help to point them out…

Computer & Video Games reviewed *Tombstone City* (TI99/4a, Texas Instruments), *Gridrunner* (C64, Llamasoft), *Scrabble* (Spectrum, Psion), *Killer Gorilla* (BBC, Micropower) and on cartridge, *Gorf* (VIC-20, Commodore).

There was also a review of *Miner 2049er* (Atari 400/800, Big Five Software). Bill Hogue's ten-screen platform game was the inspiration for the newly released *Manic Miner*, according to Matthew Smith. On the flipside, C&VG gave *Sheepwalk* (Spectrum, Virgin Games) a big fat zero for value for being no better than a BASIC type-in and as much fun as collecting scabs.



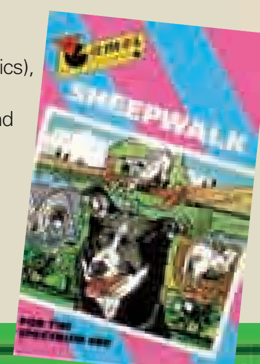
» The multi-named Enterprise (formerly Flan) seems to have inspired the Amstrad CPC's livery with its red and green keys.

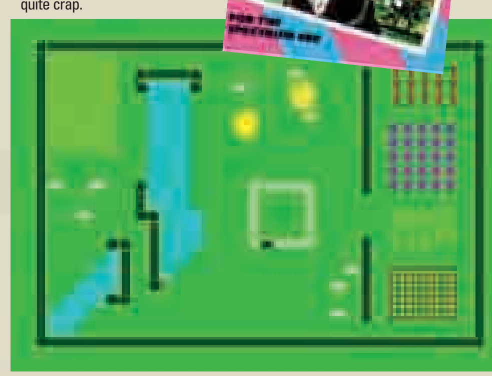


» *Killer Gorilla* (BBC): Micropower's *Killer Gorilla* was conversion number 934 for the year of the tried and trusted arcade classic.

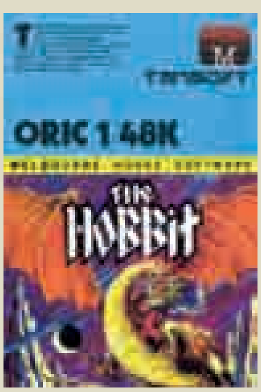
The ever-expanding page count of Your Computer included a couple of pages looking at *Pssst* (Spectrum, Ultimate), *Gridrunner* (Dragon 32, Llamasoft), *Xenon* (Oric, IJK Software) and *Qix* (Atari 400/800, Atari). Meanwhile Popular Computing Weekly again featured software reviews for some of the more exotic systems around, as well as the old favourites. Games coverage included *Jungle Fever* (Spectrum, A&F Software), *Pheenix* (Spectrum, Megadodo Software), *Cygnus* (Jupiter Ace, Richard Roberts Software), *California Goldrush* (C64, Anik Microsystems), *Battle Of Britain* (Lynx, Maincomp), *Arena III* (TI99/4a, Lizard Games), *Xadom* (Spectrum, Quicksilva) and *Android Attack* (BBC, Computer Concepts).

Issue 17 of Your Sinclair included Spectrum reviews of *Tobor* (Elfin Software), *Spawn Of Evil* (dk'Tronics), *Halls Of The Things* (Crystal Computing) and *Dallas* (CCS).





» *Sheepwalk* (Spectrum): Newly formed Virgin Software released this as one of its launch titles. It was, unfortunately, really quite crap.



» *The Hobbit* (Oric): The best-selling adventure finally makes it way onto the not so best-selling home computer.

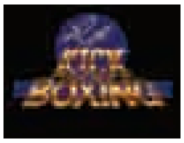


» Activision's three latest releases: one about pigs, one about teeth and one about a fairytale.

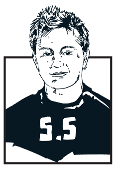


PANZA KICK BOXING

IT'S LIKE BOXING, BUT WITH YOUR FEET



- **PUBLISHER:** FUTURA
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** TOURNAMENT FIGHTER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMIGA
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** FREE



HISTORY

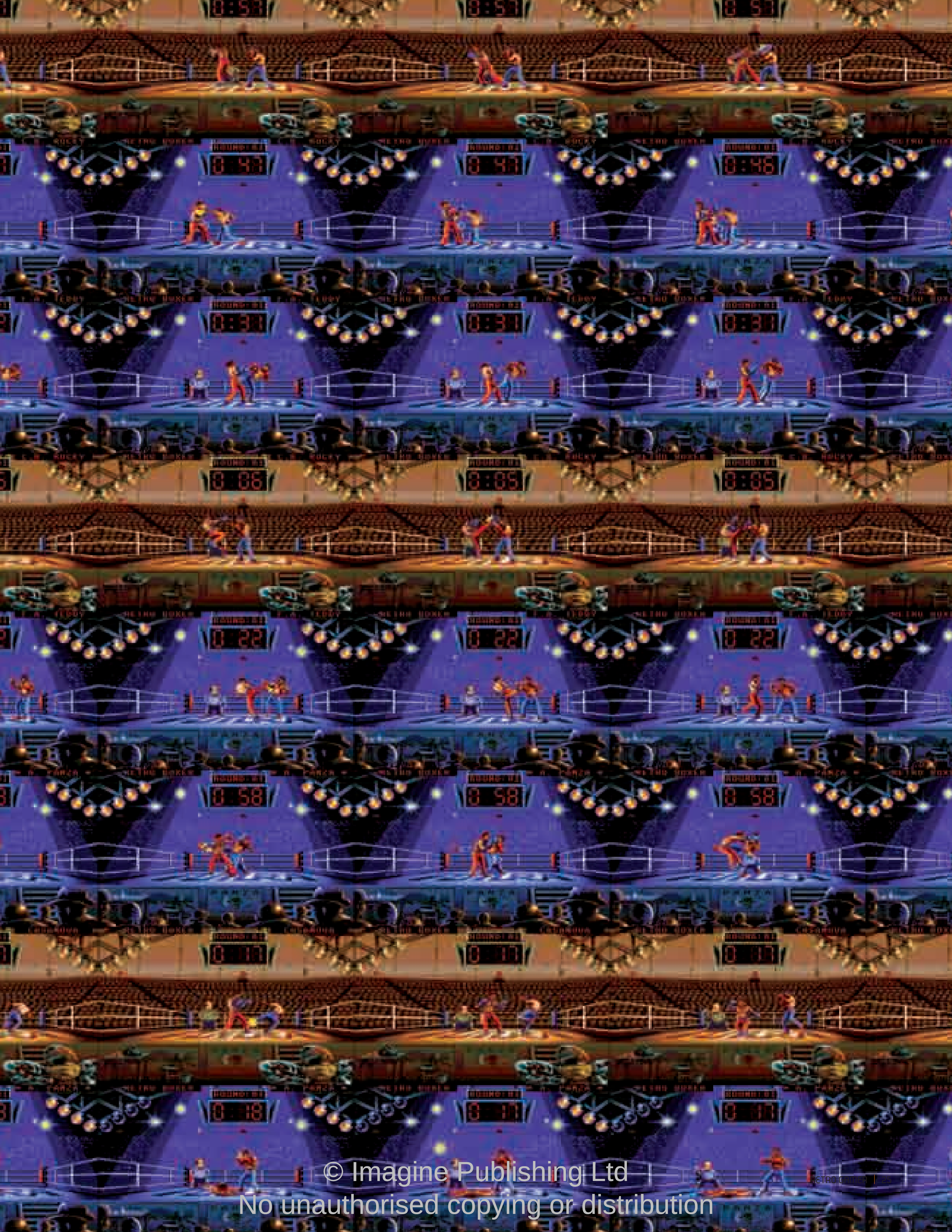
Although it was more than capable, the Amiga was never replete with truly world class beat-'em-ups. That's why games like *Panza Kick Boxing* are so important; achieving its worthy accolade by employing brains as well as a big, dripping vat of brawn.

You see, not only was Andre Panza's (the world kick boxing champion at the time) French-made fighting game a brilliantly dynamic one-on-one, it scored a hard-earned "ippon" in the technical arena, too. Using still-frame captures from video footage of actual kick boxers to create the detailed animations, *Panza*'s team crafted a remarkably realistic and fluid moving set of characters.

Alongside the lavish detail poured into creating the moves, reactions to being hit were also thoroughly and painstakingly drafted into the mix. A powerful rising heel kick under the chin sent the opponent's head backward in a violent, whip-lashing jolt, while a damaging turning kick to the knee saw him shuffle backwards uncomfortably, trying to create some small distance in which to recuperate. Hook punches to the ribs were clearly felt by the recipient who bent and twisted involuntarily from the shock, and a badly timed blow saw the inevitable return attack land all the more agonisingly.

As if this visual feast weren't enough, *Panza Kick Boxing* employed a control method rarely seen in fighting games even to this day. Since the Amiga used only one fire button (as most computer game systems did at the time), joystick directions were a vital part of an extended arsenal. *Panza* went one further than the standard eight directions plus fire button combo, however, and allowed players to redefine the moves allocated to each direction (with or without the fire button) from an impressive catalogue of over 50 available moves. The custom character was then armed with a comprehensive, and user-friendly, battery of kick boxing moves.

If ever there was a retro game robbed of its gold medal, it's *Panza Kick Boxing*. Go and play it now, *s'il vous plaît*.



BLOOD SIMPLE – THE HISTORY OF

MORTAL KOMBAT

MORTAL KOMBAT A-Z

When Mortal Kombat burst onto arcade screens in a shower of gore back in 1992, few would have predicted that it would go on to become one of Midway's most enduring (and successful) franchises. Darran Jones takes a look back at the series' illustrious history, whilst trying to learn every fatality.

Midway's *Mortal Kombat* franchise is now 15 years old and, like many petulant teenagers of the same age, it has gone through a variety of changes – some good, a fair few bad – as it has desperately struggled to recapture the greatness it once enjoyed during the mid Nineties.

Mortal Kombat: Armageddon has recently been released for Nintendo's Wii, and not only has the machine's innovative controller helped to breathe new life into what some gamers was fearing had become a rapidly stagnating series – it has also proven that there's still plenty of mileage in one of gaming's most brutal franchises, even if it is now seen as a shadow of its former self. But wait, we're getting somewhat ahead of ourselves. We're only in the second paragraph and are already praising a brand new release, so let's remember that we are actually first and foremost a retro gaming magazine, borrow Richard Burton's time machine and head back to good old 1992.

Hmm, Burton's machine must be on the blink, as instead of arriving at *Mortal Kombat*'s first public unveiling, we're outside the offices of Midway, and it's 1991, not 1992!

"What you have to remember is that the original game was our response to a number of things," begins co-creator Ed Boon. "Obviously *Street Fighter II* was huge in 1991 and Midway had not entered into the fighting arena yet. We also had this new digitised images technology, which (at the time) was state of the art and we wanted to do a game that would lend itself to big images. Finally we were all fans of those cool (and sometimes cheesy) martial arts movies like *Enter The Dragon*, *Bloodsport* and *Big Trouble In Little China*."

As a result of all these different reasons, work on *Mortal Kombat* surged ahead and Boon, co-creator John Tobias and the rest of the four-man team were soon on their way to creating a rival to Capcom's incredibly successful sequel. While the small team was confident of their new title, they knew full well the might of what they were up against and were not arrogant enough to assume they had a '*Street Fighter II* beater' on their hands.

"I don't think we were ever dreaming THAT big at the time," laughs Boon. That would have been like trying to come up with a 'Windows Beater' operating system."

With Midway wanting to counter the success of Capcom's seemingly unstoppable beat-'em-up behemoth as quickly as possible, Boon soon encountered his first major problem.

A is for Animality: Special finishing move that sees the victorious character changing into a unique animal form and killing his opponent.

B is for Blocking: Unlike many other fighters, *Mortal Kombat* has an actual block button.

C is for Comic: Such was its popularity, a comic was released in 1992. The official comics were by Midway, while the non-canon versions were by Malibu Comics and ran from 1994 to 1995.

D is for Defenders of the Realm: A cartoon series voiced by Luke Perry, Clancy Brown and Ron Perlman. It was released in 1996 and ran for 13 episodes.

E is for Ed Boon: Co-creator of *Mortal Kombat*.

F is for Fatality: Signature death moves that are performed on stunned characters.

G is for Get Over Here!: Chant heard whenever Scorpion uses his spear attack.

H is for Hydro: The friend of Sub-Zero has the ability to control water. He is a new character from the *Mortal Kombat* comic line.

I is for Ice-T: The notable rapper is said to be a huge fan of the original *Mortal Kombat*.

J is for John Tobias: Co-creator of *Mortal Kombat*.

K is for Kombat Kodes: Special six-digit codes that can be entered into *Mortal Kombat 3* and which alter gameplay mechanics and let you fight hidden characters.

L is for Liu Kang: Champion of the original *Mortal Kombat* tournament who was eventually turned into an undead zombie after being murdered by Shang Tsung.

M is for Mortal Monday: Mortal Monday was coined to anticipate the arrival of *Mortal Kombat*'s home console release.

N is for Noob Saibot: The original Sub-Zero, and co-creators Boon and Tobias's surnames spelt backwards. Since Tobias left the company this character is now referred to as Noob.

O is for Outworld: A magical realm populated by dark forests, barren deserts and pools of acid. Is ruled in secret by The One Being.

P is for Pac-Man: A carving of Pac-Man can be seen on the right wall of the Palace Gates stage in the original game.

Q is for Quan Chi: A powerful sorcerer and necromancer who we're only including because we can't think of anything else beginning with Q.

R is for Raiden: God of thunder who was played by the not very god-like Christopher Lambert in the original *Mortal Kombat* movie.

S is for Steve Ritchie: The announcer of *Mortal Kombat I* and *II* claims he came up with the name 'Mortal Kombat' and not Midway who chose 'Mortal'.

T is for TV series: *Mortal Kombat: Conquest* appeared in 1998 and was a prequel to the events of the first film. Starred Kristanna Loken who went on to become the T-X in *Terminator 3*.

U is for Ultimate Mortal Kombat: Brand new DS game that was recently announced by Ed Boon. Will feature wireless play and Puzzle Kombat.

V is for Version Exclusives: Over the years, numerous titles have received exclusive content to help set them apart from other versions of the game.

W is for Wave Net: A rare online network for *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* that was only tested in Chicago and San Francisco.

X is for X-Rated Action: The dark themes of the *Mortal Kombat* series have meant it's constantly running foul of the ESRB and ELSPA.

Y is for Yamaha: An inferior soundboard that was dropped in favour of Williams' DCS sound system for *Mortal Kombat II*.

Z is for Zeus: The arcade hardware that was used for *Mortal Kombat 4*.

Rogues Gallery

A BRIEF RUNDOWN OF MORTAL KOMBAT'S MAIN

Ashrah
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat Deception
Best Signature Move: Nature's Torpedo
Best Fatality: Magic Melt

Baraka
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat II
Best Signature Move: Head Swipe
Best Fatality: Decapitation

Bo' Rai Cho
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
Best Signature Move: Puke Puddle
Best Fatality: Belly Flop

Chameleon
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat Trilogy
Best Signature Move: Speedy Serpent
Best Fatality: Spine Rip

Cyrax
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 3
Best Signature Move: Detonator
Best Fatality: Self-Destruct

Daegon
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Armageddon
Best Signature Move: Fiery Hands
Best Fatality: Body Bash

Dairou
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deception
Best Signature Move: Stealthy Shadows
Best Fatality: Rib Eye Gouger

Darrius
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deception
Best Signature: Chest Cruncher
Best Fatality: Body Part Rearranger

Drahmin
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
Best Signature Move: Propeller Clock
Best Fatality: Iron Bash

Ermac
First Appearance: Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3
Best Signature Move: Telekinetic Slam
Best Fatality: Telekinetic Massacre

Goro
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat
Best Signature Move: Chest Pound
Best Fatality: Skin Rip

Havik
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deception
Best Signature Move: Torso Spin
Best Fatality: Arm Eater

Hotaru
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deception
Best Signature Move: Grasshopper
Best Fatality: Do The Twist

Hsu Hao
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
Best Signature Move: Bouncing Death
Best Fatality: Laser Slicer

Jade
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat II
Best Signature Move: Razor-Rang
Best Fatality: Decapitation

Jarek
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 4
Best Signature Move: Lasso Snatch
Best Fatality: Heart Rip

Jax Briggs
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat II
Best Signature Move: Ground Pound
Best Fatality: Arm Rip

Johnny Cage
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat
Best Signature Move: Split Punch
Best Fatality: Torso Rip

Kano
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat
Best Signature Move: Eye Laser
Best Fatality: Open Heart Surgery

Kenshi
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
Best Signature Move: Tele-Flurry
Best Fatality: Telekinetic Crush

Khameleon
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat Trilogy
Best Signature Move: Square Wave
Best Fatality: Bone Stripper

Kintaro
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat II
Best Signature Move: Rapid Fireball
Best Fatality: Skin Rip

Kira
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deception
Best Signature Move: Kiss Of Death
Best Fatality: Stomach Ripper

Kitana
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat II
Best Signature Move: Fan Toss
Best Fatality: Head Chop

Kobra
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deception
Best Signature Move: Chi-Blast
Best Fatality: Heart Ripper

Kung Lao
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat II
Best Signature Move: Hat Throw
Best Fatality: Hat Trick

Mavado
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
Best Signature Move: Anger Management
Best Fatality: Kick Thrust

Meat
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 4
Best Signature Move: Head Roll
Best Fatality: Head Rip

Mileena
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat II
Best Signature Move: Teleport Kick
Best Fatality: Bone Stripper

Mokap
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
Best Signature Move: Charge Punch
Best Fatality: Head Rip

Moloch
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
Best Signature Move: Suction Breath
Best Fatality: Head Rip

Motaro
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 3
Best Signature Move: Tail Projectile
Best Fatality: Decapitation

Nightwolf
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 3
Best Signature Move: Spirit Arrow
Best Fatality: Vanishing Light

Nitara
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
Best Signature Move: Blood Spit
Best Fatality: Blood Thirst

Quan Chi
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero
Best Signature Move: Skull Toss
Best Fatality: Neck Stretcher

Raiden
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat
Best Signature Move: Lightning Bolt
Best Fatality: Electrocution

Rain
First Appearance: Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3
Best Signature Move: Lightning Lift
Best Fatality: Uppercut

Reiko
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 4
Best Signature Move: Vertical Teleport
Best Fatality: Shuriken Shower

Reptile
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat
Best Signature Move: Power Slide
Best Fatality: Tasty Meal

Sareena
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero
Best Signature Move: Split Kick
Best Fatality: Demon Fang

Scorpion
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat
Best Signature Move: Bloody Spear
Best Fatality: Toasty

Sektor
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 3
Best Signature Move: Chest Missile
Best Fatality: Flamethrower

Sheeva
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 3
Best Signature Move: Untamed Fury
Best Fatality: Skin Rip

Shinnok
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat Mythologies
Best Signature Move: Summoned Fiend
Best Fatality: Hand From Hell

Shujinko
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deception
Best Signature Move: Flip Scissor Kick
Best Fatality: Body Slicer

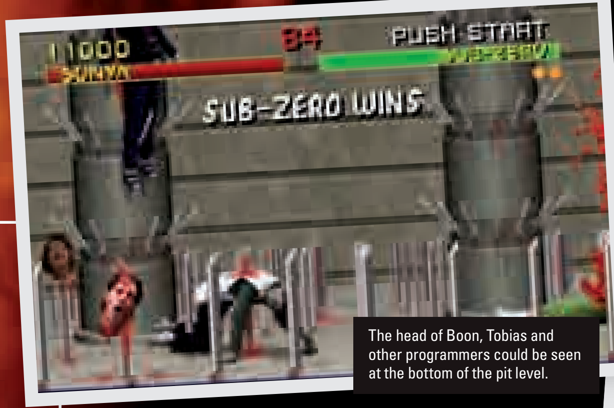
Sindel
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 3
Best Signature Move: Banshee Scream
Best Fatality: Super Scream

Smoke
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat II
Best Signature Move: Air Throw
Best Fatality: Teleport Punch

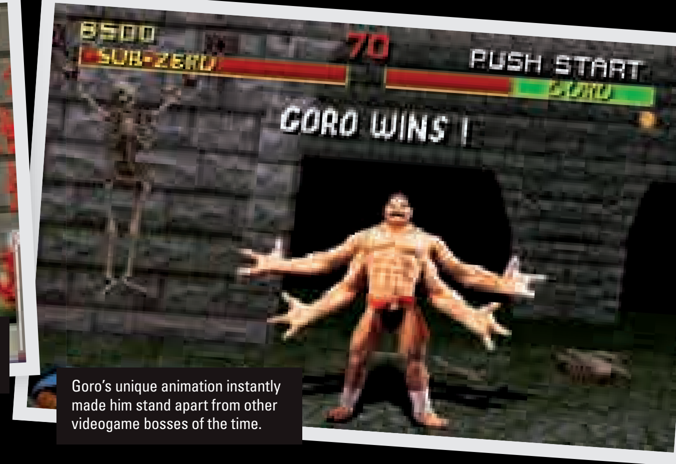
Sonya Blade
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat
Best Signature Move: Leg Grab
Best Fatality: Kiss Of Death

Stryker
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 3
Best Signature Move: Grenade
Best Fatality: Tazer

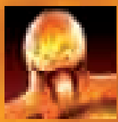
Sub-Zero
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat II
Best Signature Move: Freeze
Best Fatality: Head Rip



The head of Boon, Tobias and other programmers could be seen at the bottom of the pit level.



Goro's unique animation instantly made him stand apart from other videogame bosses of the time.

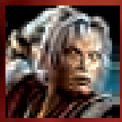


Blaze
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat II
Best Signature Move: Quake Slam
Best Fatality: N/A

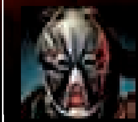
CHARACTERS



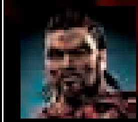
Frost
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
Best Signature Move: Ice Puddle
Best Fatality: Ice Shatter



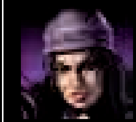
Fujin
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero
Best Signature Move: Tornado Wind
Best Fatality: Wind Skinner



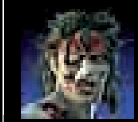
Kabal
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 3
Best Signature Move: Sawblades
Best Fatality: Head Inflation



Kai
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 4
Best Signature Move: Rising Heel
Best Fatality: Body Breaker



Li Mei
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance
Best Signature Move: Sparkler
Best Fatality: Super Crush Kick



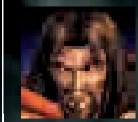
Liu Kang
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat
Best Signature Move: Flying Bicycle Kick
Best Fatality: Dragon



Noob Saibot
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat
Best Signature Move: Disabler
Best Fatality: Teleport Slam



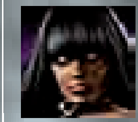
Onaga
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Deception
Best Signature Move: Dirty Face
Best Fatality: Decapitation



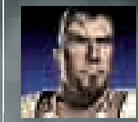
Shang Tsung
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat
Best Signature Move: Morphing
Best Fatality: Soultaker



Shao Kahn
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat II
Best Signature Move: Ridicule
Best Fatality: Human Nail



Tanya
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat 4
Best Signature Move: Surging Blast
Best Fatality: Twisted Kiss



Taven
First Appearance: Mortal Kombat: Armageddon
Best Signature Move: Godly Charge
Best Fatality: Wrath

Time – or lack thereof. "*Mortal Kombat* was put together in an incredibly fast time," he confirms. "I'd say that from start to finish it took us roughly eight months and the biggest problem we encountered was trying to do the game in such a small time frame. Thankfully, once we got the basic fighting down and everyone was so excited about that aspect of the game, the rest of the gameplay just sort of fell into place."

Wanting to stay away from the six-button set-up that had served *Street Fighter II* so well, Midway instead devised a four-button system for alternating light and heavy punches and kicks, while a fifth button was controversially used to block (many fighting games of the time, including *Street Fighter II*, simply required you to pull back on the joystick).

"We always found it odd that you would get a 'free block' if someone was attacking you while you were walking backwards," explains Boon about their unusual decision. "We felt blocking should be a much more deliberate action that the player should initiate, as opposed to sometimes being done automatically."

Another gameplay mechanic that helped *Mortal Kombat* stand out from its peers was the inclusion of juggling, which enabled a skilled fighter to continually pummel his opponent while they were helpless in the air. Like the combos of *Street Fighter II*, the juggling system was discovered by accident while the game was being tested.

"The juggling was something that we discovered was in the game pretty early on and we decided to expand on it. When someone accidentally got two or three hits on their opponent their reaction was always positive. Whenever something unintentionally fun happens in one of our games, we try to develop it further."

With juggling, advanced blocking and the combat system in place, everyone considered what could be done to counteract the bold aesthetics of *Street Fighter II*. Ken, Ryu, Chun-Li and the rest of the *Street Fighter* gang were already instantly recognisable figures in arcades around the world thanks to Capcom's distinctive stylings and the vibrant colours that had been used. So rather than emulate Capcom's cheerful-looking brawler, Midway used technology that was more in keeping with

> *Another gameplay mechanic that helped Mortal Kombat stand out from its peers was the inclusion of juggling*

its new bloody creation. *Q*bert* creator Warren Davis had already been honing his video digitisation skills for several years before the release of *Mortal Kombat*, so by the time it was finally utilised for Midway's new fighter the technology produced suitably impressive results.

"Digitised graphics were state of the art at the time," recalls Boon about Midway's decision to use the new technology. "People were used to seeing the more 'cartoony' graphics of *Street Fighter* and other games, so our graphics looked much more realistic by comparison."

He certainly wasn't wrong and considering the brutal combat that took place in each fearsome match, the gritty, realistic look was for more suitable for *Mortal Kombat*'s mature content. And what mature content it was. Many of the moves – while not being as well

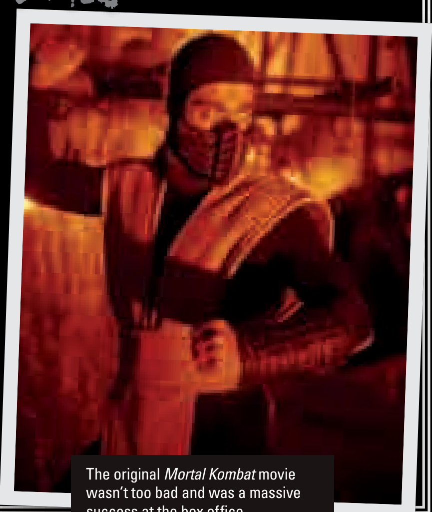
Mortal Movies

Paul WS Anderson is normally a name to be feared if you're a fan of the *Resident Evil* franchise or *Alien Vs Predator*, but back in 1995 he actually achieved the impossible and created a decent videogame-to-film adaptation of *Mortal Kombat* starring Christopher Lambert as Raiden.

After the misfires of both *Street Fighter: The Movie* and *Super Mario Bros*, Anderson's interpretation was considered something of a success and managed to gross an impressive worldwide figure of over $122 million. Indeed, before the arrival of the Angelina Jolie vehicle *Tomb Raider* it was the most successful videogame-to-film offering of all time and allowed Anderson to move on to such projects as *Event Horizon* and the aforementioned *Resident Evil*.

A sequel, *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation*, followed in 1997 but lacked the charm and authenticity of Anderson's original. Both Lambert and Anderson were no longer attached, the vast majority of the original cast were nowhere to be seen and many of the fight scenes were poorly choreographed.

A third film, again starring Christopher Lambert as the god of lightning, is tentatively scheduled for a 2010 release date and is said to be a brand new re-imagination of the franchise.


The original *Mortal Kombat* movie wasn't too bad and was a massive success at the box office.



Johnny Cage celebrating after a particularly nasty fatality.

animated as Capcom's effort – were extremely savage and ranged from the *Street Fighter*-styled fireballs of Liu Kang to the flamboyant splits and swift punch to the crotch of Johnny Cage. Blood flowed like a river from each of the seven main characters and the bone-crunching effects only heightened the wince-inducing injuries that the pugilists constantly suffered. While Scorpion's bloody spear attack – followed by a swift "Get over here!" – is arguably *Mortal Kombat*'s most iconic move, it was the gruesome fatalities that helped raise its status amongst gamers and had censor groups the world over twitching their

> Midway was told by the family-friendly Nintendo of America that the graphical content would have to be toned down

typewriters with excitement.

After all, it's not every day that you can control a character that can reach into someone's chest and pull their still-beating heart out, leaving the lifeless body to slump to the floor. However, that's exactly what you could do once you worked out Kano's fatality (it's back, down, forward, light punch when standing close to your opponent in case you're wondering). Other memorable fatalities from the first game included Sub-Zero ripping off his foe's head and proudly displaying it with the spinal cord still attached, Sonya Blade using a lingering kiss to turn the unlucky opponent into a pillar of flame, and Raiden's ability to use lightning to turn any nearby head into a gloopy mush of pulp.

"Everyone on the team contributed ideas for the fatalities," recalls Boon about *Mortal Kombat*'s most distinctive hallmark. "There were also PLENTY of them that we thought were crossing the line and didn't include. Most of them had to do with technical limitations, but there certainly were some that were rejected because they went into the category of 'bad taste'."

Indeed, such was the extremity of its death moves (and the game's overall tone) that action was swiftly taken against Midway's new arcade hit. Helped in part by Sega's FMV title *Night Trap*, which depicted a group of teenagers being stalked by vampiric foes, the two titles are arguably responsible for the forming of the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) which began regulating the content of all videogames upon being established in 1994.

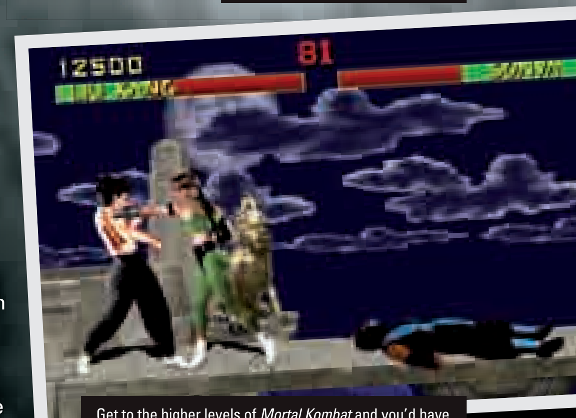
The ESRB weren't' the only ones unhappy with *Mortal Kombat*'s gruesome content and when the hit game was converted to Nintendo's SNES, Midway was told by the family-friendly Nintendo of America that the graphical content would have to be toned down. As a result all the blood was taken out of the SNES release and the fatalities were greatly toned down. Therefore, if you were a console owner and wanted the 'true' version of *Mortal Kombat*, Sega's Mega Drive was the machine to go for. Sega actually exploited this by directly promoting Acclaim's Mega Drive version.

"When we found out that the blood would have to be replaced with 'sweat', we knew that [the SNES] version was doomed," recalls Boon about Nintendo's dramatic decision. "Thankfully, by the time *Mortal Kombat II* came out, Nintendo decided it was okay to have the blood and that version turned out to be perfect. Great graphics, great gameplay and lots of BLOOD!"

If Boon was pleased that Nintendo had relaxed its policies by the time *Mortal Kombat*'s sequel was released, he was less than happy with the involvement he had with the home console and computer versions of the earlier games.

"While we did have approval rights to the various home versions, the approval itself was kind of vague, which (unfortunately) allowed some issues that we had with the game to go unaddressed," he sadly recalls. "The SNES and Genesis versions of the original game, for example, were dramatically different in terms of presentation, graphics and actual gameplay. The same thing happened with the movies and TV series."

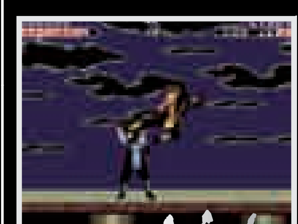
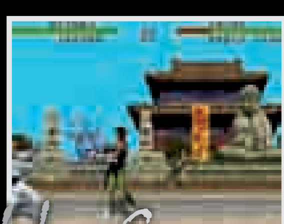
Boon may have had concerns with the various home versions, but that didn't stop gamers, and the title that

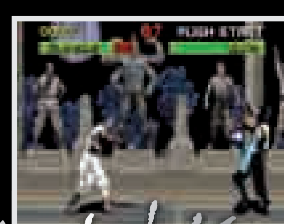
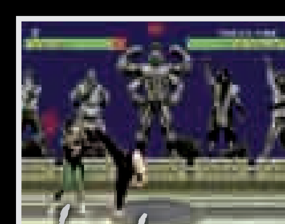


Get to the higher levels of *Mortal Kombat* and you'd have to fight two fighters directly after each other.



Defeating *Mortal Kombat*'s final boss made for spectacular viewing.

Notable Conversions of Mortal Kombat

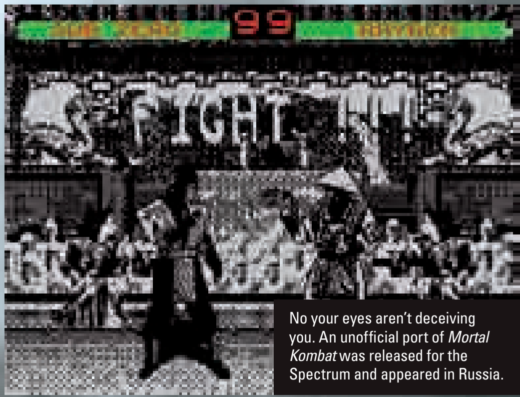
MASTER SYSTEM
It certainly tries, but the Master System just can't cope with a game of *Mortal Kombat*'s complexity. While the machine's limited graphical capabilities made a fair stab at recreating the arcade's visuals, much of the core game was missing. There were only two stages, six characters (Kano is missing) and the lack of buttons made it very hard to pull off special moves and fatalities.

MEGA DRIVE
Now this is more like it. You had to have a six-button pad and input a special code that unlocked the blood in order to get the full *Mortal Kombat* experience, but this is generally considered to be the most complete version of the game in terms of actual authenticity. Aesthetically, however, it's not quite up to the superior looking SNES version. Worth tracking down though.

GAME BOY
While it boasts some fairly solid visuals, this is otherwise a very poor effort that has similar issues to the lacklustre Master System outing. This time, though, there's no Johnny Cage, the controls are even fiddlier to use and the horrendous music will make you want to sew up your ears so it can't destroy your sanity. A shambolic release that should be avoided at all costs.

SNES
This could have been the best home version, but Nintendo of America's strict policies of the time meant that many were turned off by the SNES outing's lack of blood. Another issue was that the ability to counter air attacks was missing and it featured a different combo system from the original arcade game. Good, but not quite good enough.

AMIGA
Amazingly, you could actually play this impressive-looking Amiga version with just one fire button. And while it was far from perfect, it was much better than some of its console brethren. Mega Drive and SNES owners wouldn't have been convinced, but Amiga purists had a fun fighter they could really sink their teeth into. A very solid effort that works very well.



No your eyes aren't deceiving you. An unofficial port of *Mortal Kombat* was released for the Spectrum and appeared in Russia.





had caused *Street Fighter II* cabinets to lie forgotten in arcades was soon achieving the same success at home. Midway, Tobias and Boon wanted more though, and with the word 'Fatality' still ringing in gamers' ears, the talented duo set to work on a sequel that would be bolder, brasher and, of course, much, much gorier…

Realising that they had the makings of a huge franchise on their hands, Tobias and Boon's plans for their bloodthirsty sequel were simple: they just did a Spinal Tap and turned everything up to 11. The seven combatants from the original game were boosted by a further five fighters including the dual-blade-wielding Baraka, Jax Briggs (who went on to star in the truly forgettable *Mortal Kombat: Special Forces*) and green ninja Reptile, whom gamers had first encountered as a hidden character in the arcade original.

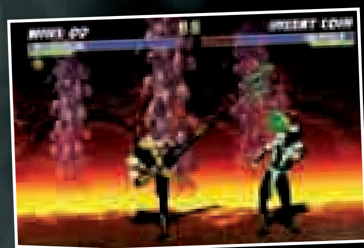
The increased character roster wasn't the only enhancement that Midway had included. The sequel had a far darker theme, both in tone and graphically when compared with *Mortal Kombat* – a good example being the black dragon logo that was used now used – and this extended to the popular fatalities that could be used to decimate your opponent. Each character now had a minimum of two distinct fatalities, with many of them making the barbaric moves from *Mortal Kombat* look like minor indiscretions instead of the gruesome acts they so obviously were. Johnny Cage had learnt had to tear a person in half since his last tournament, while US Special Forces agent Jax would rip the arms of anybody that gave him gip. Shang Tsung could rip his opponent's soul from them, while Reptile simply ate people and spat out their remains. Best of all, though, was Liu Kang's Dragon fatality that allowed him to morph into a huge green dragon and bite his adversary in half.

As well as a variety of vicious death moves, characters could also use certain stages to finish off their opponents – or, for total humiliation, the new babalities and friendships that Midway had included. Babalities would simply turn your opponent into a screaming infant, while friendships resulted in your fighter giving his nemesis a wrapped present instead of finishing him off with a deadly attack. Extremely hard to pull off, both babalities and friendships had players rabidly awaiting the release of each new magazine of the time in the hope that the latest moves would be revealed and they could try them out at the local arcade.

While plenty of new finishing moves had been created, gamers were somewhat concerned that *Mortal Kombat II*'s core gameplay hardly differed from its popular predecessor. Although a few minor adjustments had been made to the core fighting mechanics – crouching punches and a stronger roundhouse kick were just two additions – the standard moves were essentially unchanged from *Mortal Kombat*. Each character may have looked different, but unlike Capcom's pugilists, the Midway fighters performed exactly the same attack styles and as a result experts could pretty much beat novices with whomever they chose. This was no doubt a result of Midway's original decision to use digitised

Off the beaten track

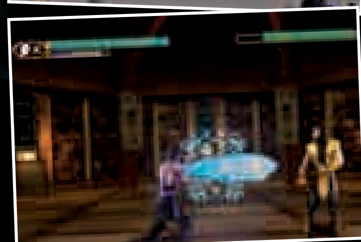
TWEAKED UPDATES AND DIRE SPIN-OFFS… THE VERY BEST AND WORST OF THE MORTAL KOMBAT FRANCHISE.



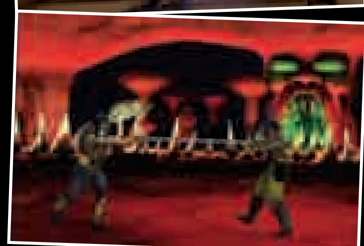
ULTIMATE MORTAL KOMBAT 3
Released: 1995 onwards
Systems: Arcade, Mega Drive, PlayStation 2, Saturn, Super NES, 360 XBLA
This tweaked version of *Mortal Kombat 3* contained two new tournament modes, as well as a variety of new moves for several characters including Sonya and Liu Kang. There were also several new characters, as all the missing ninjas that appeared in both *Mortal Kombat* and its sequel had now been included.



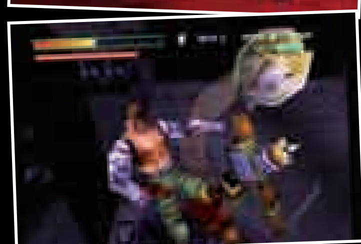
MORTAL KOMBAT TRILOGY
Released: 1996
Systems: Game.com, Nintendo 64, PC, PlayStation, Saturn
Not three separate games, but an amalgamation that contains every character from the first three titles. New features included an Aggressor Bar, a Brutality move which causes an opponent to explode, and more new moves. The N64 version offered 3-on-3 simultaneous battles and an exclusive female character called Khameleon.



MORTAL KOMBAT MYTHOLOGIES: SUB-ZERO
Released: 1997
Systems: N64, PlayStation
It is incredible to think that *Mythologies* sold over 1 million units, as it truly is one of the worst gaming turds that you're ever likely to encounter. It was critically panned the world over and is a terrifyingly bad game that features atrocious gameplay and tired-looking aesthetics. Even the most die-hard aficionados will despise it.



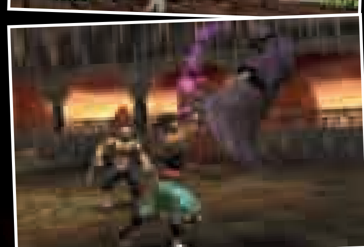
MORTAL KOMBAT GOLD
Released: 1999
Systems: Dreamcast
Released exclusively for Sega's Dreamcast, *Mortal Kombat Gold* was a next-generation update of *Mortal Kombat 4* that featured several characters that hadn't appeared in the original game, including Kitana, Mileena, Baraka and Sektor. Sadly, the original release was riddled with bugs – so many, in fact, that a revision was released – and it looked vastly inferior to Namco's *Soul Calibur*.



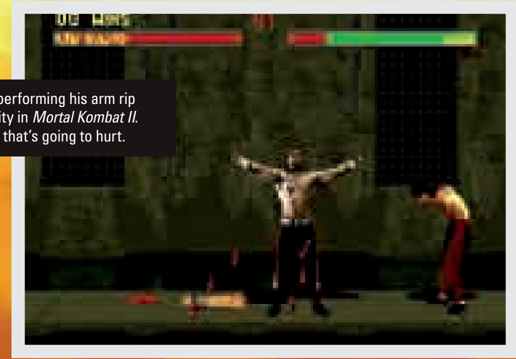
MORTAL KOMBAT: SPECIAL FORCES
Released: 2000
Systems: PlayStation
If you thought *Mythologies* was bad, you've obviously had the fortune to not encounter the dire *Special Forces*. Widely considered to be the worst ever *Mortal Kombat* title, *Special Forces* marked the departure of co-creator John Tobias and several other key Midway staff. As a result the planned N64 version was cancelled and the game was quickly rushed for a budget release.



MORTAL KOMBAT: UNCHAINED
Released: 2006
Systems: PlayStation Portable
Unchained was an update of *Mortal Kombat: Deception* but included eight extra characters, including four from the 2002 release *Deadly Alliance*. Midway also included a brand new Endurance mode and the ability to play wirelessly against other PSP owners. Whilst reasonably good fun, it's let down by the PSP's clunky D-pad and awkwardly placed buttons.



MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS
Released: 2006
Systems: PlayStation 2, Xbox
It's quite possible that *Shaolin Monks* is the standalone adventure that Boon and Tobias had envisioned when *Mythologies* was created. Although not without its flaws, it's a clever arcade adventure that finally puts to rest the travesties of *Mythologies* and *Special Forces*. There's an inspired Ko-Op mode, lots of frenzied fighting and some enjoyable mini-games. The best spin-off by a country mile.


Jax performing his arm rip fatality in *Mortal Kombat II*. Now that's going to hurt.

Happy Easter



With the success of *Mortal Kombat*, Midway was keen to give something back to the fans that had helped make the game such a massive hit. As a result, *Mortal Kombat II* contained a number of hidden features that would activate when certain buttons were pressed or in-game requirements were fulfilled.

The most famous is obviously Dan Forden who would appear in the bottom right of the screen and shout "Toasty!" (and occasionally "Frosty!" if Sub-Zero was being used) whenever a character performed a perfect uppercut. While Forden made his first appearance in *Mortal Kombat II*, the move became so popular that it returned in later games as well.

Other Easter Eggs that appeared in Midway's sequel included a clone of Atari's classic coin-op *Pong* that would appear after the 250th two-player game had been played (this only appeared in the arcades and not the home versions) and a 'Fergality' that was exclusive to the Mega Drive release. By selecting 'Oooh Nasty!' from the cheat menu, choosing Raiden and fighting in the Armoury, your defeated opponent would turn into the former founder and CEO of Probe Entertainment, Fergus McGovern, when they were eventually killed.


Mortal Kombat: Armageddon on the Wii makes it much easier to perform special moves and fatalities thanks to the remote control.

characters and it wouldn't be until *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* that each fighter would develop their own distinct fighting styles.

Mortal Kombat II's fighting (while a whole lot of fun) may have still looked archaic when compared to the graceful fluidity of *Street Fighter II*, but the majority of gamers didn't seem to mind and it became another huge success for Midway that spawned several impressive ports (blood thankfully now intact). Learning babalities, fatalities and friendships would only keep gamers happy for so long though, so Boon and Tobias set to work on their next creation, the imaginatively named *Mortal Kombat 3*.

Although many hardcore fans will decree Midway's third *Mortal Kombat* game to be the best in the series, just as many felt it was the beginning of the end for the still massively popular franchise. After trailing behind Midway in the popularity stakes, Capcom went back to the drawing board and came back with *Street Fighter Alpha*: a complete reinvention of the series that featured a brand new fighting system and superb cartoon visuals. While Midway had been constantly added subtle gameplay tweaks to its franchise since the release of *Mortal Kombat*, its once exciting series was suddenly looking rather tired. Midway carried on regardless, though, and the faithful were treated to a number of new features including a 'Run' button, pre-programmed button presses called 'Chain Combos' (which are unblockable if a strike is landed) and a new 'Animality' finishing move that would see the selected fighter change into a specific animal before mauling his fallen opponent. Other juicy additions were the ability to choose specific difficulty levels, 'Kombat Kodes' that could be entered on the VS screen and would modify various gameplay mechanics, and a new 'Mercy' move that would give a stunned opponent a small amount of health back so you could use a fatality on them. It was even possible to knock your opponent through the ceilings on certain levels so you could continue your fight in brand new stages. Many new characters were also added, including a trio of cyborgs called Cyrax, Smoke and Sektor. Like the ninjas before them, all three characters were essentially modelled on the same actor, in this case Sal Divita.

Frustratingly for fans, the arrival of several new combatants meant that not all the original fighters had made the roster, and as a result Johnny Cage, Scorpion, Reptile and Raiden were nowhere to be seen. The absence of many of the characters was due to Daniel Pesina (the actor who played Cage and the game's various ninjas) being fired for appearing in an ad for a rival fighting game called *Blood Storm*, and helping Data East (along with his brother who played Raiden) to make its own realistic brawler called *Tattoo Assassins*. Fans were furious with the absence of the popular characters and they eventually appeared in Midway's revised update, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat*, although now played by new actors.

Despite several successful ports, Tobias and Boon knew that their series needed a drastic rethink and while the 1997 release of *Street Fighter III* would see Capcom sticking with its tried and tested 2D format, Midway finally decided that the time was right to make the brave leap to the third dimension. Boon was concerned about how the game would play in 3D though, especially as the 1996 3D release of *Street Fighter EX* hadn't been greatly received by Capcom's die-hard faithful. Although *EX* was still essentially a 2D game in a 3D engine, it featured very complex animation that Boon felt impeded the gameplay. As a result, he decided to stick with the tried and tested formulae of previous *Mortal Kombat* titles and the final gameplay was practically identical to its 2D predecessors. This decision once again split fans, as compared to the majesty of Namco's *Soul Calibur*, *Mortal Kombat 4* felt rather primitive, despite utilising a brand new game engine named Zeus. It lacked the eight-way movement of Namco's outstanding fighter and couldn't hope to match it in the aesthetics department – and let's not forget the stunningly fluid animation and absorbing gameplay of the *Virtua Fighter* franchise, which was already in its third incarnation by the time Midway's own 3D fighter was eventually released. All of a sudden *Mortal Kombat*, which had wowed gamers with its over-the-top gameplay, realistic visuals and incredibly gory finishing moves, was now starting to look a little tired and for many followers it never recovered. Even several new characters like Shinnok (a female version of Goro), Fujin and Quan Chi, who had all appeared in the dire *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*, weren't enough to save it, and while it was another success for Midway – mainly due to its aggressive marketing campaign – it was the last title in the franchise to be released in the arcades. *Mortal Kombat* needed a new home, and a new direction, if it was to recapture the hearts of its fans. A 128-bit stopgap appeared in the form of *Mortal Kombat Gold* on Sega's


Puzzle Fighter from *Mortal Kombat: Deception*. It's like *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* but with blood and gore.

Tell me a story



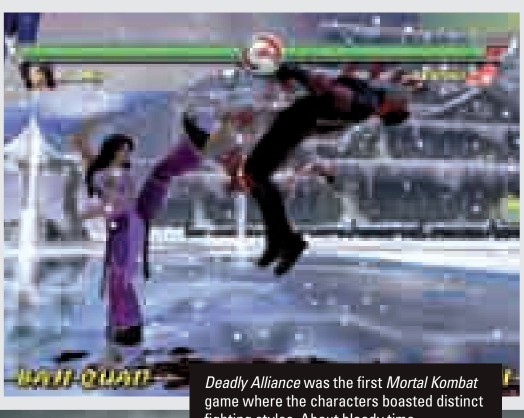
One thing that sets the *Mortal Kombat* series apart from other fighting franchises is its in-depth storyline, which has become more convoluted and fragmented as the series has progressed. It's far too lengthy to detail here, but it essentially deals with the Outworld trying to conquer the Earth Realm. Taking its inspiration from numerous cultures and mythology, including China and Japan, the series has often frustrated fans due to the often-conflicting storylines that conveniently forgot key revelations that had appeared in previous games. While *Mortal Kombat* was the first released game, it actually takes place after the events of *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub- Zero*, which focuses on the popular ninja's attempts to retrieve a stolen amulet from Quan Chi, who later appears as a playable character in *Mortal Kombat 4*.



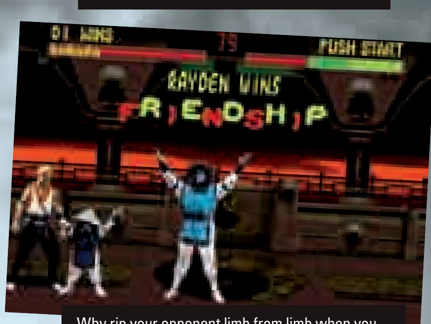
Handheld honours

While popular in the arcades and on home machines, Midway's franchise hasn't exactly fared well on handhelds, with *Mortal Kombat Advance* and *Mortal Kombat Tournament Edition* on the GBA being so bad that they deserve their own boxout. *Mortal Kombat Advance* was a handheld port of *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* that had been greatly pared down and suffered from a lack of buttons, while *Tournament Edition* was a rather poor port of *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* that messily married 2D sprites with 3D gameplay.

Fortunately, it's not all bad news for the handheld scene, as the PSP's *Mortal Kombat: Unchained* is a surprisingly polished effort and is only let down by the PSP's own D-pad. Then there's *Ultimate Mortal Kombat* for Nintendo's DS: yet another adaptation of *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*, only this time it will boast wireless play and the popular mini-game Puzzle Kombat.



Deadly Alliance was the first *Mortal Kombat* game where the characters boasted distinct fighting styles. About bloody time.



Why rip your opponent limb from limb when you can be nice to them? Raiden shares the love.

> *All of a sudden Mortal Kombat was now starting to look a little tired, and for many followers it never recovered*

Dreamcast in 1999, but Tobias, dissatisfied with life at Midway, left the same year and went on to form Studio Gigante along with several other key members of the *Mortal Kombat* team. The hastily finished spin-off *Special Forces* was a complete flop and Boon was left to pick up the pieces. His answer came three years later in the form of *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* – at that point in time, the series' most ambitious offering.

Appearing five years after *Mortal Kombat 4*, *Deadly Alliance* started to make in-roads in correcting many of the annoyances that had appeared in previous games. Aesthetically, the game was much improved over the last arcade game and featured greatly enhanced character models, far more fluid animation and greater freedom of movement in the 3D playing areas. 11 new characters, ranging from the blind Kenshi to the unlockable Vampire Nitara, bolstered the total roster (once everything had been unlocked) to 23 and popular stalwarts Raiden, Sub-Zero, Scorpion, Johnny Cage and Sonya Blade were all present and correct.

Gameplay had also been markedly improved with many of the characters featuring two unique fighting styles to switch between at the touch of a button. If that wasn't enough, they also had a weapon that could be employed for further damage. Granted, special moves and fatalities for each character had been reduced in number – and babalities, friendships and animalities were nowhere to be seen – but this was easily the most comprehensive *Mortal Kombat* that Boon and the rest of the team had put together. And with bonuses like the all-new Konquest mode and the Krypt (essentially a shop for unlocking characters and other items), Boon made sure that there was plenty for everyone.

With favourable reviews from the press and brisk sales, *Mortal Kombat*, while still behind the likes of *Tekken*, *Virtua Fighter* and even Tecmo's *Dead Or Alive*, was back on track and fans were eager to see what Boon had up his bloody sleeves for the next instalment.

Mortal Kombat: Deception built on the blocks of *Deadly Alliance* and, like *Mortal Kombat II* had done 11 years earlier, offered even more for fans to get to grips with. The roster now featured a grand total of 24 fighters (26 in the GameCube version). Each character now had two fatalities and they could even commit Hara Kiri on themselves. Gameplay had also been greatly refined and now featured more interactive objects to slam your opponents into, far more fluid character movement and more balanced fighting styles, meaning that it was far more beneficial to switch between styles than it had been in *Deadly Alliance*. However, while plenty of attention had gone on refining the fighting mechanics, the gap between *Mortal Kombat* and its rivals was widening and while there was no denying that the series still remained great fun to play, it lacked the intricacy and sheer depth of many of its peers.

Still, what *Deception* lacked in skill it made up for in sheer variety thanks to its greatly enhanced Konquest Mode: far more accessible and enjoyable to play than its predecessor and offering over 20 hours of gameplay. Other notable additions included the superb Chess Kombat (which saw captured pieces taking part in miniature fights) and Puzzle Kombat, an unashamed rip-off of Capcom's sublime *Super Puzzle Fighter II* Turbo. Boon wasn't finished though and also included a greatly expanded Krypt that now featured nearly 700 unlockable items ranging from additional outfits to a full-length soundtrack. There was also the option to play online, although only for PlayStation 2 and Xbox owners. Arcade-adventure spin-off *Shaolin Monks* appeared a year later, but Boon knew that he needed a title that was bigger, bolder and better than everything that had come before it. Basically he needed an *Armageddon*.

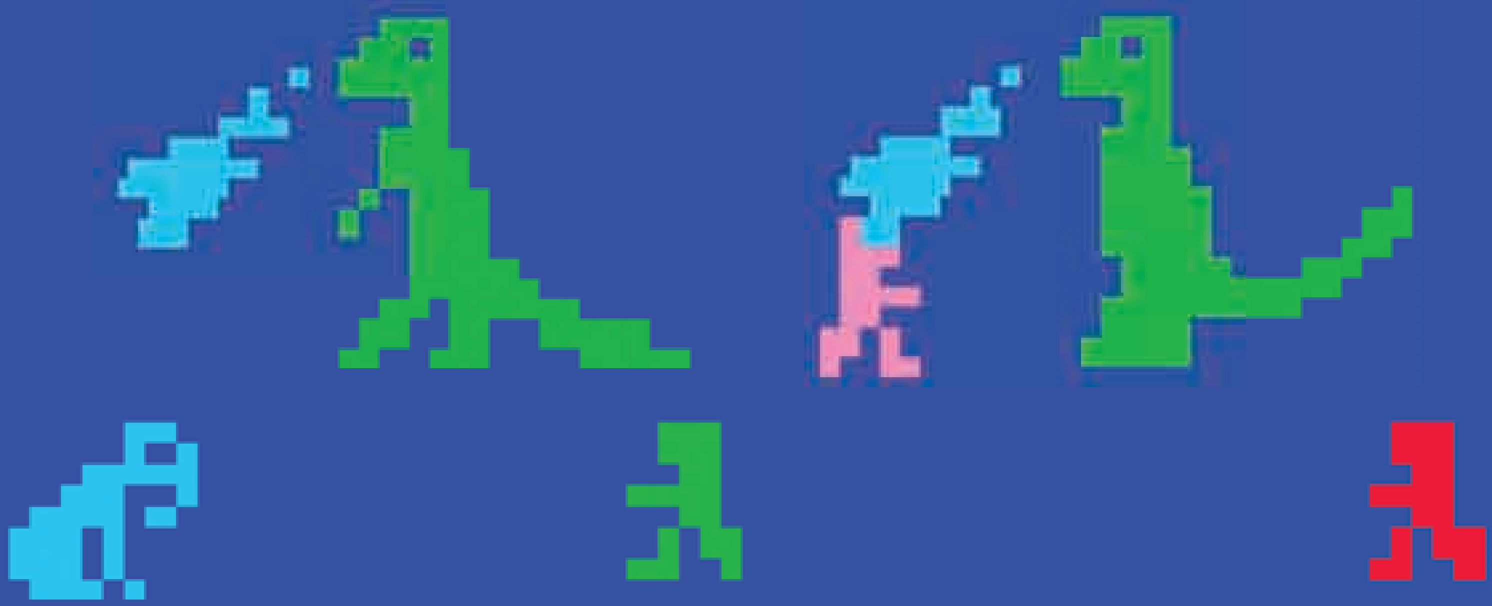
Recently released on Nintendo's Wii, *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon* is the biggest *Mortal Kombat* yet. It's still not going to convince non-fans that the series is able to stand shoulder to shoulder with the likes of *Virtua Fighter* and *Soul Calibur*, but there's no denying that if you're looking for simple mindless fun, *Armageddon* has all bases covered. While the PlayStation 2 and Xbox versions featured an amazing 62 characters that were playable from the very start, the Wii version goes one better and adds in Khameleon, who had originally appeared in the N64 version of *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*. Although it does lack online play, what sets the Wii version apart from its older console counterparts is the fact that the game has now been built around the machine's unique control system (although it's still possible to play with a GameCube or Classic Controller for that authentic *Mortal Kombat* experience).

"We began working on the control scheme for the Wii from the beginning of its development," says Boon. "It was something that was in a constant state of refinement and the simpler we made the controls, the more fun people had."

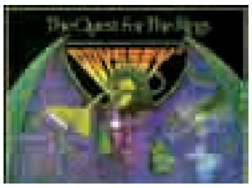
Indeed, such is the simplicity of *Armageddon* that many of the game's special moves can be pulled off with a quick flick of the wrist and other simple hand gestures, meaning that even the most inept of players will be able to pull off *Armageddon*'s spectacular-looking finishing moves. But how does Nintendo feel about the control being used for such gruesome actions, especially after the recent banning of Rockstar's *Manhunt 2*. "I can't speak for Nintendo personally," says Boon, "but my understanding is that they would like to have all kinds of games available for the Wii, not just those for kids."

It may have gone through the wringer several times over the last 25 years, but it would appear that Midway's famous franchise isn't going to be disappearing any time soon – indeed *Mortal Kombat 8* is already in the works – and Boon puts this down to the team never being afraid to take risks.

"I think the main reason we've managed to sell big numbers this far has been because we are not afraid to make dramatic changes to *Mortal Kombat*," he comments. "There have been a number of fighting games that are selling far fewer games because they are essentially the same game they were ten years ago, but with prettier graphics. The average player just thinks, 'been there, done that'. *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon* plays nothing like *MK II*, which plays nothing like *Ultimate MK3*. If all those games played the same, we would have fallen into obscurity like some of our competition has."



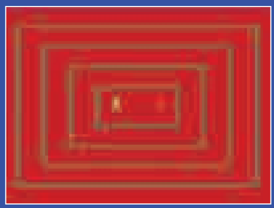
IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** MAGNAVOX/PHILIPS
- » **DEVELOPER:** MAGNAVOX/PHILIPS
- » **RELEASED:** 1981
- » **GENRE:** RPG
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10-30



» At the bottom right of the game board can be seen a castle named 'Staup'. Ed Averett named it after Mike Staup, the vice president of games at Magnavox.



» Okay, so the menu screen wasn't exactly outstanding, but it represented the descent into a dangerous labyrinth quite well.

QUEST FOR THE RINGS

Retro gamers know better than anyone that severely limited hardware is the best incentive for developers to push themselves to maximise – and actively improve upon – the underpowered host system. Quest For The Rings epitomised exactly this kind of forced evolution of the woefully underrated Philips G7000 Videopac, bringing Dungeons & Dragons, Tolkien and videogames together under one magnificent banner.

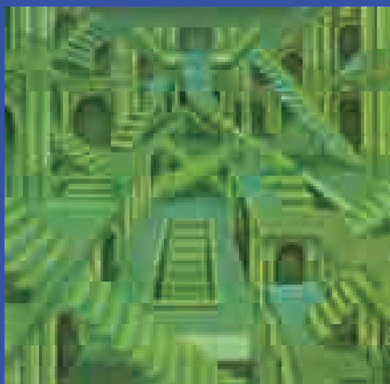
Sibling of the first ever videogame console, the Magnavox Odyssey, the Philips G7000 Videopac never saw the same kind of domestic popularity. But the limited number of games and unusual development process (almost all the G7000's games were designed by just one man, including *Quest For The Rings*) meant this terrific machine had a very distinct and appealing flavour. The unique design of the base unit, with its grossly underused membrane keyboard, presented a host of opportunities for an experienced designer. A new application of the keyboard was central to the Master Strategy Series of games – chief among them being *Quest For The Rings*.

The G7000 had all but reached the zenith of its gaming abilities when designer Ed Averett answered the call of gamers who'd been bombarding Magnavox with both fan mail and requests. The marketing strategy for the G7000 (using the keyboard and maths games to push an educational slant to what was essentially just a games console) meant it had proven popular with younger children and families. Parents were asking for games that would expand on the family-centric activity while providing more of a cerebral challenge than simply an action-based one. Averett concluded that the best option to achieve this was to combine his games with the most popular form of family-oriented gameplay: board games.

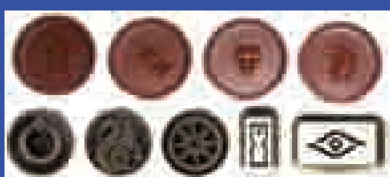
Quest For The Rings was the second and finest of his three Master Strategy games (a fourth was planned, but never released). The real genius of the game was the perfect combination of board-based play interspersed with on-screen action. A thin plastic overlay was placed on the membrane, transforming it from a typical QWERTY keyboard into a game-specific control panel.

The board game aspect is set up first. Ten ring tokens are placed randomly on the many locations around the map of Riproaria, Zombia and Applegarth by a third participant known as the Ringmaster (I'd like to volunteer mum or dad for that particular job). Every location, whether it has a ring token or not, is covered with a 'Castle Cap', so only the Ringmaster knows their locations. Additionally, monster tokens are placed under some of the caps (usually the ones with rings, so the quested items are properly protected).

The heroes begin at any of the ports around the coast and progress along the pathways to the next castle. Each turn is marked by an hourglass which moves



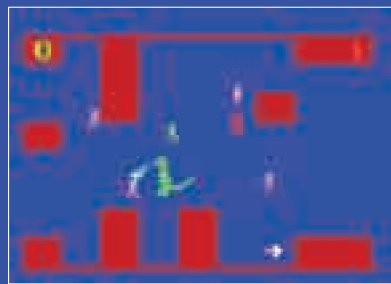
» The concept artwork for the Shifting Halls, found in the magnificent, gold-embossed instruction booklet.



» If you look inside the Castle Caps which hide the Ring and Monster tokens, you can see which kind of labyrinth the heroes must enter. Make sure you've got all the pieces, or the board game part will suffer.

along the numbered list at the bottom of the board, determining how much time the heroes have to recover all ten rings. Once a castle is reached, the cap is lifted to see if there's a ring and/or monster present. Underneath the cap there's also a designation determining what type of castle labyrinth the combatants are about to brave: dungeon, crystal cavern, inferno or shifting hall.

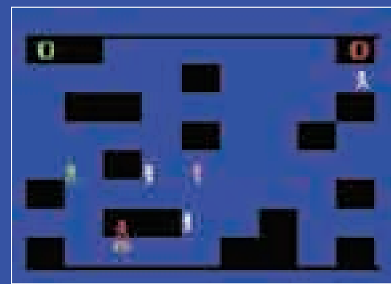
Now it's time to switch to the screen, as the particulars are entered on the keyboard overlay (for instance, a crystal cavern with a dragon and a ring present). All castles are inhabited by savage orcs and evil fire-wraiths, regardless as to whether there's a larger enemy imprisoned in the labyrinth. The Quest company consists of four heroes, two of



» The heroes must battle a dragon in an inferno – and there wasn't even a ring in the castle!

which enter each castle: a warrior who wields a powerful sword, a wizard who casts immobilising spells, the changeling who can walk through solid walls and a phantom who wears the Mirrorcloak of invisibility. Each has his own very specific talents, and a careful choice must be made when deciding which team will attempt to recover the ring or, if there's no ring in the castle, find an escape route for the… fellowship.

Computer-controlled 'hero' characters were still a little beyond the scope of the G7000, which means *Quest* requires a minimum of two simultaneous players (perhaps the game's only flaw). But this is also where the wonderful – and distinctly family-friendly theme – comes into play, demonstrating how the game's weakness is also its greatest strength. It quickly becomes apparent that teamwork is utterly imperative to success, as is a considered and flexible tactic for every assault. If, for example, the heroes are entering an inferno (whose molten lava walls are fatal to the touch) then sending in the phantom renders one player effectively unarmed, as their power to walk through walls is useless. If the labyrinth consists of shifting halls, however (whose walls periodically shift about the screen, trapping players), the phantom is a powerful ally free to



» The 'phantom' character (seen here inside the black wall above the ring) is easily overlooked, but can prove a valuable ally.

navigate the hostile terrain while all else is at the mercy of the variable maze.

On top of this considered decision-making, players must adopt a decidedly selfless approach to escape or retrieval, as most scenarios demand that one player defend or cover the other so they might slip through the castle defences alive and grab the precious ring, or even deliberately sacrifice themselves for the good of the Quest. This inherent form of comradeship has seldom been captured in a videogame as beautifully as in *Quest For The Rings*. The Ringmaster also has several 'possession' tokens at their disposal, allowing them to commandeer one of the joysticks as the heroes enter the labyrinth and effectively work against the other player; a superb turn of events that adds a spectacularly tense dynamic to any Quest.

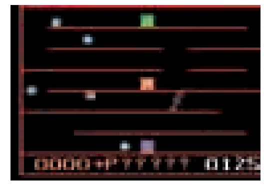
Although the graphics are blocky and limited, they serve their purpose well and are more than shored up by the magnificent Tolkienian artwork on the map and in the accompanying booklet. Averett provided a superb instruction manual which not only explained the intricate gameplay so a seven-year old could understand it, but also built a micro-mythology around the Quest that's made this game as immortal and ageless as the rings you're searching for.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GOLF
PHILIPS VIDEOPAC
1979

PICKAXE PETE
PHILIPS VIDEOPAC
1982

MUNCHKIN
PHILIPS VIDEOPAC
1982

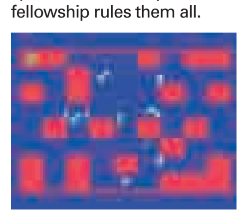


FOUR OR MORE

While the game requires a minimum of two players (who can operate without a Ringmaster assuming they're honest when it comes to placing the rings on the board and carefully oscillate the downturned castle caps, domino style), the game's family-friendly visage doesn't necessarily end there.

Four heroes can easily be accommodated (five including a dedicated Ringmaster, of course) as any seasoned Questers will know. One method – that's slightly less fanatical than the whole role-playing premise deserves – is to simply alternate players at each castle.

But for a more engrossing Quest, assigning a specific role to each player makes for an invigorating and truly heroic gaming experience as the party collectively decides who's best with each character and which member is required for each specific task. Family as a fellowship rules them all.





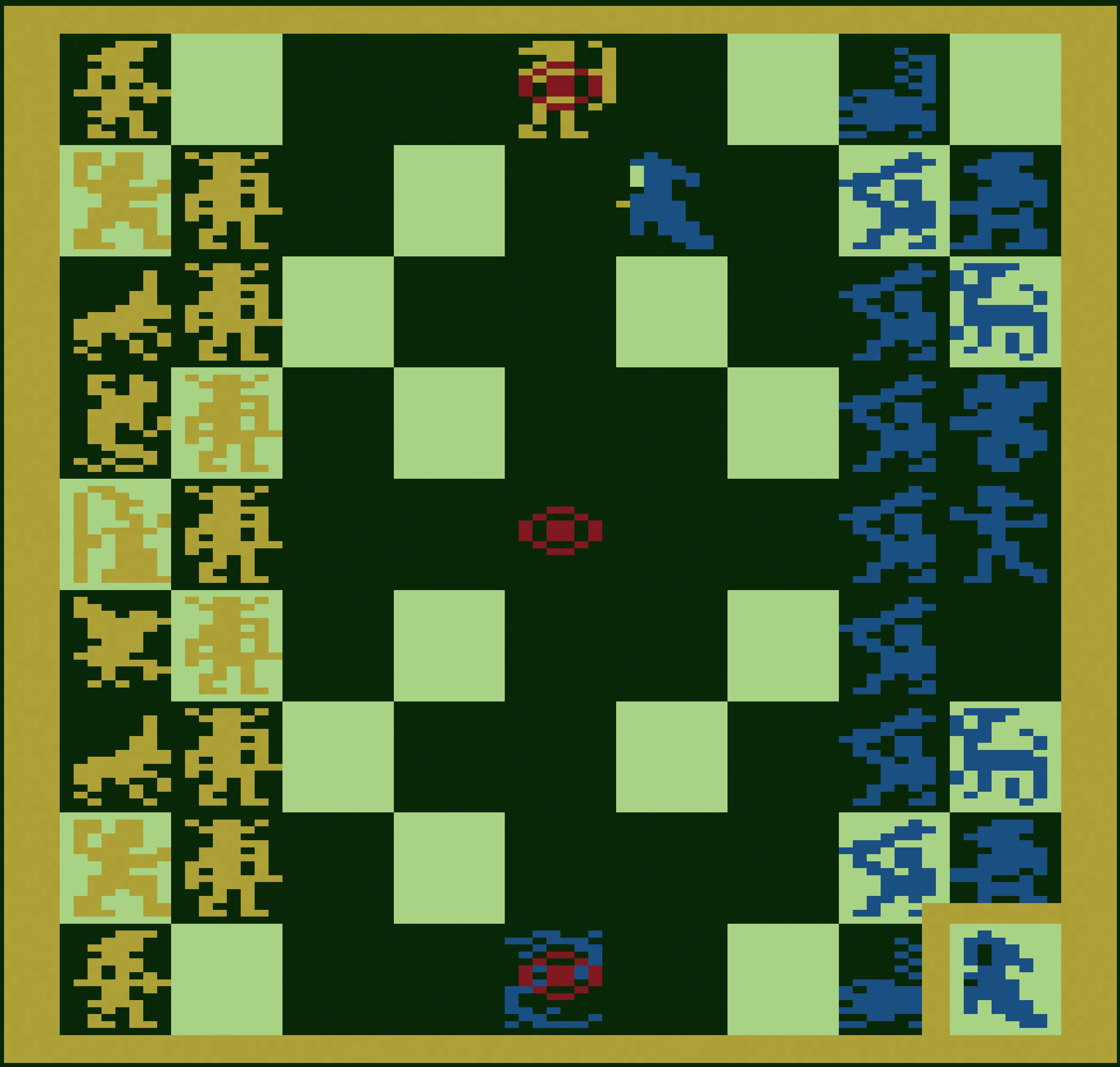
» This thin plastic overlay was placed over the membrane keyboard to change it into a control panel for the on-screen action.

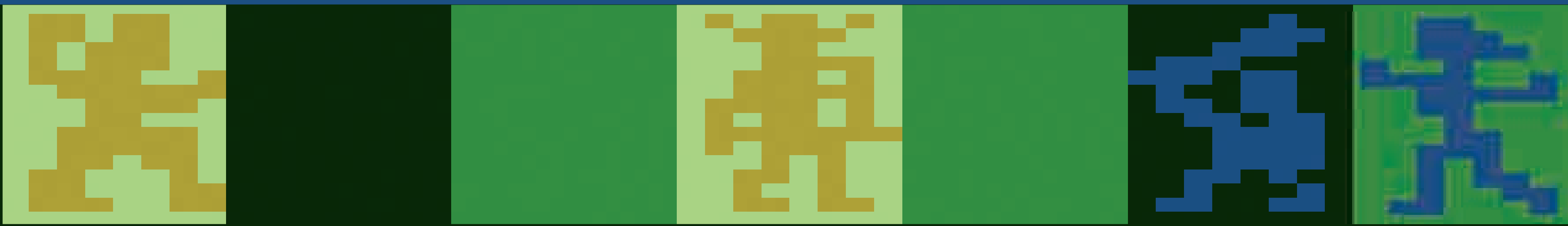


» Gameplay was split equally between the G7000 and this superb, Tolkien-esque board.

ARCHON

One of the earliest genre mash-ups, Archon's combination of chess-like board-game strategy, frenetic combat sequences and fantasy characters won the hearts of a generation. Craig Grannell talks to co-creator Jon Freeman about how the project came to be, and how a last-minute intervention from the publisher helped the game achieve its classic status.





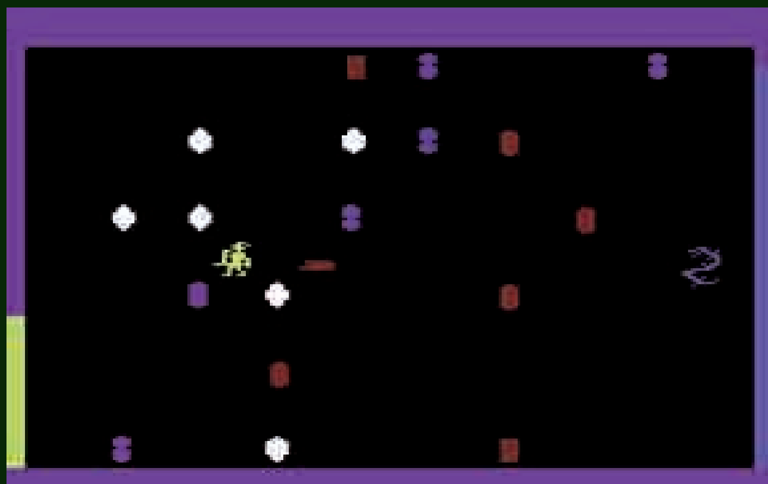
A*rchon*'s mix of arcade-game combat and cerebral, chess-like strategy ensured it stood out when released in 1983, and the game is well remembered today, still feeling unique and fresh after almost 25 years. "Before *Archon*, there were two basic styles of computer game: slow, deliberate, turn-based, cerebral games (chess, adventure games, or military strategy games); and 'mindless', fast-action, 'twitch' games, which were typically clones of coin-op arcade games," begins Jon Freeman, explaining the thinking behind *Archon*'s multi-genre approach. "This seemed to us a false dichotomy. Why not mix the two elements, reward quick thinking, and balance strategy with action? This seems obvious now, but lots of people at the time weren't at all sure it made sense."

Convinced a combination of game styles was the way forward, Jon Freeman, Anne Westfall and Paul Reiche started developing the game, spurred on by having signed the first two contracts with fledgling software company Electronic Arts. "We wanted a game that required – and rewarded – thinking, but that wasn't as ponderous as chess," recalls Jon. "Adding arcade action – something you couldn't do with an ordinary board game – would keep the game moving and unpredictable."

Although keen to exploit the possibilities videogames afforded over board games, the board itself came first. "Its design was the intersection of an intended visceral reaction and sheer technical practicality," explains Jon. "We wanted something fairly similar to a chessboard, but different, so people would have two immediate, contradictory reactions: 'It's a chessboard' and 'It's not a chessboard' – that is, 'I get it' and 'It's different'. Both of those feelings were important."

The chess-like set-up gave players a frame of reference, but the rules, pieces, ever-changing board and combat elements were all new. The board became a nine-by-nine grid, governed by the limitations of the Atari 400/800's built-in tiles and sprites – during development, ten squares per edge had crowded the screen, while eight or fewer merely provided a de facto chessboard or limited potential for tactics. The nine-by-nine board also created vertical and horizontal central lines that defined the game's important squares: the power-points. Rather than capturing the opponent's king, the aim in *Archon* became to control the five power-points. (Alternatively, obliterating the opposition leads to victory for those players preferring violence over strategy!)

"Variable squares – impractical and unheard of on cardboard, but simple for a computer – served as another means of differentiating *Archon* from conventional board games and keeping the game fluid," adds Jon. Working out the colours took a few iterations, and the final design was a mix of aesthetics and tactical balance. "The starting points were instantly obvious – clearly, the dark side's home square had to be black, and the light side's had to be white," says Jon. "Equally obviously, to get the kind of dynamic game we wanted,



» "You're no Saint George," snarled the dragon, about to turn the foolhardy knight into a small pile of briquettes.

"WE WANTED A GAME THAT REQUIRED – AND REWARDED – THINKING, BUT THAT WASN'T AS PONDEROUS AS CHESS. ADDING ARCADE ACTION – SOMETHING YOU COULDN'T DO WITH AN ORDINARY BOARD GAME – WOULD KEEP THE GAME MOVING AND UNPREDICTABLE" JON FREEMAN



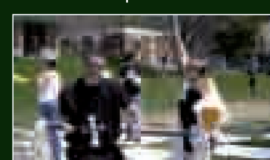
» The unicorns didn't really miss Noah's Ark by larking about – they've been playing *Archon* all this time. Phew!



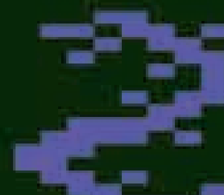
» My eyes! My poor eyes! The PC version of *Archon* ramps up the toughness level by blinding human players.

ARCHON'S INSPIRATION

In an era where the inspiration for most videogames appears to be older videogames, it's refreshing to think back to the 1980s, a time where the lack of a wealth of gaming history meant ideas had to be sourced elsewhere. "For *Archon*, there were several principal sources of inspiration," begins Jon. "There was a fantasy chess set that I admired at a science-fiction convention, which pitted Conan, as I recall, and various other heroic types against assorted villains and monsters. There was also a large-scale, live-action chess game put on by the Society for Creative Anachronism at the first Renaissance Pleasure Faire in northern California, which required the differently equipped 'pieces' to fight for possession of challenged squares." And then, of course, there's that scene in the most popular space opera of modern times, Jon slyly confirming that "the brief holographic game scene in *Star Wars* suggested the graphic appeal of the *Archon* concept".







IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS

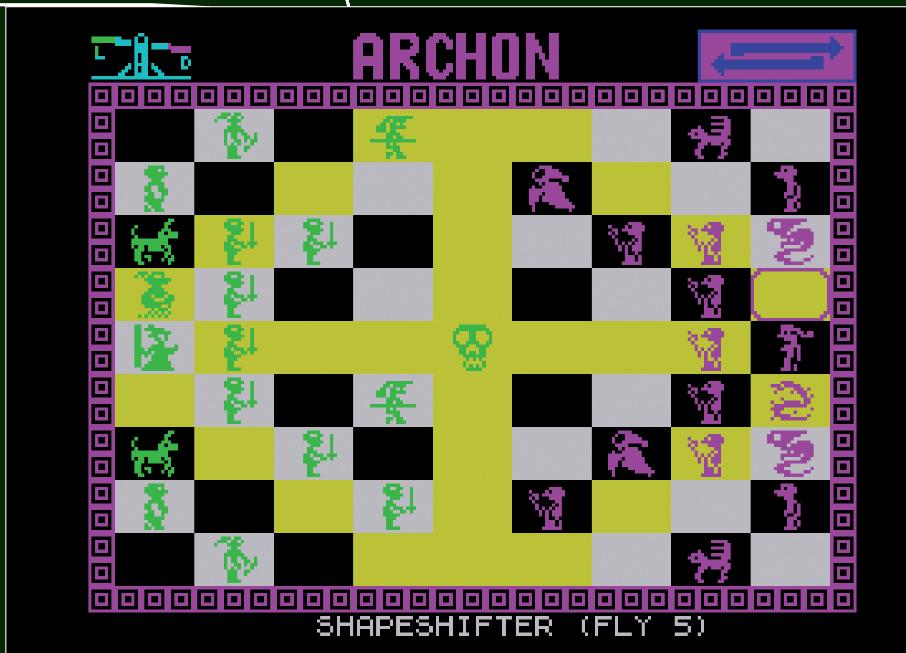
» **DEVELOPER:** FREE FALL ASSOCIATES

» **RELEASED:** 1983

» **GENRE:** STRATEGY

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

THE MAKING OF... ARCHON



» The scales in the Spectrum version helpfully suggest that the dark side's about to get its arsed kicked in the forthcoming combat session.


» "You can run, but you can't hide!" yelled the psychotic goblin. And he was right – that exit at the top really doesn't work.

the three power-points across the centre of the board had to be variable squares." And so, as the game was played, about half the board would cycle from light to dark. This wasn't a mere aesthetic consideration – Jon and co made it so that during combat, light pieces were stronger when on lighter squares and dark pieces benefited from being on darker squares.

Combat soon became *Archon*'s defining feature, setting it apart from its contemporaries. Unlike in many traditional board games, there's a direct element of risk in capturing a piece, since both pieces are transported to an arena to fight it out in a frantic one-on-one arcade game. "Keeping things from bogging down was an obsession for us," says Jon, explaining the reasoning behind the combat component. The flexibility and ever-changing nature of the board, combined with the arcade battles, meant that memorising opening sequences, as in chess, was no longer the order of the day. "Doing that seemed to us the antithesis of 'play', and so we tried to make it impossible or pointless," explains Jon. "The arcade battles rewarded quick thinking and fast reflexes, but setting up the battles – picking the site, conditions, pieces, timing and circumstance – involved strategy and deliberation."

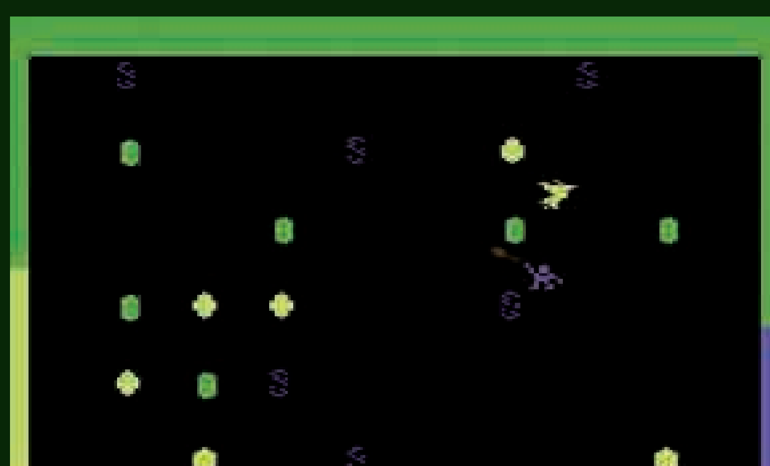
With 16 unique pieces (eight per team), the variety of match-ups is huge, ensuring replay value is high, and Jon reckons that "the fact the battles turned out to be interesting, fast-moving and exciting was crucial to the game's success". Like the board, the arenas aren't static: barriers fade and reappear, to keep the action moving. "We were afraid that if barriers were static, players might 'park' their icons behind an obstacle and only occasionally pop out to fire," explains Jon. Interestingly, double-kills are also possible if two pieces strike home while both are low on energy. "We considered ways to avoid this, but the alternatives were more work and felt arbitrary," muses Jon. "Double-kills had been a part of the live chess game I'd been in, which was a major influence on *Archon*, and we liked the impact they had on the board – when both pieces were gone, it was time to rethink strategy!"

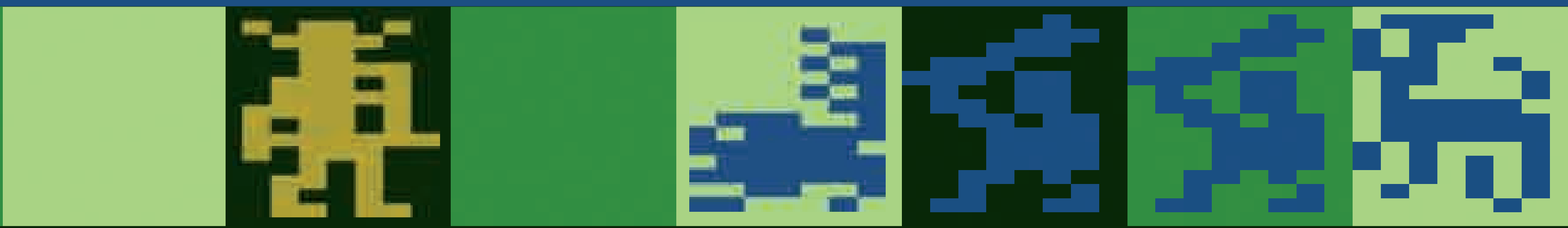
The pieces and weapons themselves arrived from days of brainstorming on the part of Paul and Jon, who scoured fantasy and mythology books, aiming to find things associated with light or darkness, and come up with plausible matches – that is, corresponding pieces. "From the outset, we tried to balance the sides and seem to have been pretty successful," reckons Jon. "We had a sense of how the pieces should – and would – play, and the tweaking of pieces and weapons during play-testing was surprisingly minor. Most players developed a favourite side, but neither side has a clear edge." A further strategic edge and additional fantasy flavour arrived in the form of each team's key figure – a wizard or sorceress – who can cast spells, such as teleporting a piece or reviving a deceased character. "The choice of spells was pragmatic: they made strategic sense; they fit the game; and they were doable without generating a lot of extra work for our overworked programmer," says Jon.

Perhaps surprisingly, one of *Archon*'s most important components was



» "Feel the power of the dark side!" yelled the sorceress. "Yes, but you're losing, dear," countered the wizard, wryly.


» The goblin mistakes the phoenix for his Sunday lunch and tries to carve himself a leg.



"THE ARCADE BATTLES REWARDED QUICK THINKING AND FAST REFLEXES, BUT SETTING UP THE BATTLES – PICKING THE SITE, CONDITIONS, PIECES, TIMING AND CIRCUMSTANCE – INVOLVED STRATEGY AND DELIBERATION" JON FREEMAN



» Hands up in horror, the djini realises he must have left the gas on, in this shot from the colourful NES conversion.

something of a last-minute addition. "Archon was designed as a two-player game," says Jon. "At the last minute, EA demanded a single-player option. In retrospect, this was absolutely the right thing to do, but at the time, in the face of an implacable deadline, the uncertain results of so much unforeseen work terrified us!" In just one month, the team had to develop, from scratch, the entire strategic and tactical AI, and this feverish work resulted in several breakthroughs. "Before *Archon*, it was assumed computer-controlled enemies couldn't out-duel a human player, and so for opposition, arcade games relied on swarms of stupid – even mechanical – baddies, fast-moving objects, unforgiving terrain and sharp limits on player movement," explains Jon. "We were confident we could make a computer opponent that was good enough and fast enough in its 'thinking' to compete with human players."

Anyone who played strategy games in the early Eighties will attest to how notoriously slow many of them were. Jon recalls that "an early and not terribly complicated SSI space war game took as long as 20-30 minutes per move for the computer to make up its mind" – and this was fairly typical. In part, poor programming was to blame, but Jon reckons the primary cause was the mistaken assumption that intelligent decision-making was necessarily slow. "For *Archon*, that premise was rejected out of hand," he says. "Obviously, the arcade action on the battlefield had to be fast, but it was also clear that a slowdown on the strategy board would ruin the flow of the game."

The team decided a decent, fast AI was preferable to a perfect, slow one; it was also important that the computer's behaviour was not too predictable. "Streamlined logic and efficient programming – and a lot of thought and sweat – produced an acceptable move in only 1/60th of a second," says Jon, proudly. "It wasn't perfect, but it was good enough – and it was so fast we had to slow it down artificially by adding a visual delay to give the impression that the computer was 'thinking'!"



» Good prevails in the world and everyone's happy. Well, apart from all the creatures who got slaughtered, obviously.

Archon's one-player mode then led to another of the game's selling points, albeit a rather more curious one: the 'no player' attract mode. "This started out as a play-testing tool and ended up as one of *Archon*'s most popular features," says Jon, tantalisingly. "Once EA decided *Archon* needed a one-player mode, it was obvious players would want freedom of choice; therefore, the computer had to be able to play either side. In the process of implementing this, Anne realised a computer player – an AI – that could play either side could, with a few minor code changes, play both sides. Suddenly, we had a game that could play itself."

Initially, this was great from a testing standpoint – the team could observe and test the computer AI on both the board and the battlefield. "Having the computer play itself exposed twice as much of its behaviour compared to playing a human," says Jon. "It also became an effective, efficient way to demo the game and, ultimately, a powerful sales tool. After *Archon*'s release, computer stores put an Atari in store windows, with the screen facing the street or the mall, and simply let the game run. Hey presto: instant crowds! As far as I know, *Archon* was the first 'arcade' (ie action) game that could play an entire game, start to finish, with no human intervention."

Despite the hectic schedule as *Archon*'s development drew to a close, the project was a success. Arguably instrumental in EA's successful debut, the game garnered plenty of publicity, favourable reviews and numerous awards. "*Archon* ended up on many top-ten lists and was named 'game of the year' in a couple of places. However, the computer-game market was smaller then, so *Archon* didn't sell the millions of copies you'd expect today from a big PC or PS2 hit," says Jon. That said, the game still sold well, and the C64 conversion ended up outperforming the Atari original, although the Amiga version fared relatively poorly.

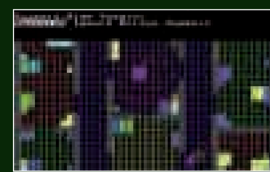
Today, Jon spends much of his time licensing Freefall's classic games on new platforms, and while he notes that "many negotiations drag on for a year and then mysteriously collapse, which is frustrating", he's hopeful regarding upcoming next-gen versions of *Archon*. In the meantime, the original game is there for everyone to play, and fond memories of creating it remain for Jon: "I have great memories of play-test sessions in our basement with Paul, Anne, myself and Robert Leyland, who programmed *Murder On The Zinderneuf* – our 'other' game with EA. Despite the 100-hour weeks, it was such an exciting time, and we were all so enthusiastic that I don't think I have any bad memories of working on *Archon*. And at almost every game conference we attended, people told us *Archon* was their favourite game, or that it was the reason they got into the games industry – how could we not feel great about that?"

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MURDER ON THE ZINDERNEUF
SYSTEMS: APPLE II, ATARI 8-BIT, C64, PC
YEAR: 1983

ARCHON ULTRA
SYSTEMS: DOS
YEAR: 1994

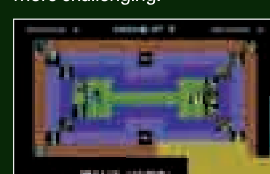
TRIPLICARDS, VOLUME ONE
SYSTEMS: WINDOWS PC
YEAR: 2002



ARCHON II: ADEPT

Jon Freeman explains the thinking behind *Adept*, *Archon*'s mid-Eighties sequel: "EA's founder, Trip Hawkins, wanted a sequel – initially just the same thing, with slightly different pieces or powers. I didn't think that would be sufficient. We held off until we could come up with something that had a similar mix of action and strategy and a sufficiently similar feel to please *Archon* fans, but that was different enough so that nobody would feel ripped-off by a simple 'me too' product."

The end result was a radical departure, with a board that started empty and looked nothing like a chessboard. "The pieces had to be 'summoned' – placed on the board – turn by turn," explains Jon. "And although the board proved less intuitive and less appealing than *Archon*'s 'chessboard', resource management and moving power-points added new strategic considerations. Also, combat was at least as much fun as in *Archon* – and arguably more challenging."





遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

FULL OF EASTERN

NAMCO'S BAREFOOT BRAWLER TAKES US THROUGH SOME OF CINEMA'S FINEST FRIGHTS

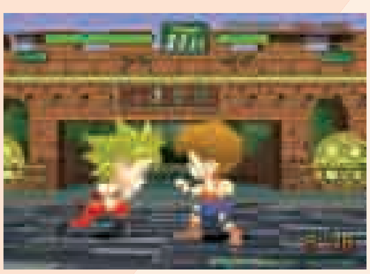
SPLATTERHOUSE: WANPAKU GRAFFITI

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES (FAMICOM)
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £20
» **CAN'T IMPORT?** SPLATTERHOUSE 2 (MEGA DRIVE)

One of the most striking, or perhaps frightening, aspects about *Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Graffiti* is the odd Super Deformed look of the game. This style of caricature is a particular type of Japanese animation, in which characters are drawn in an exaggerated manner. They are usually small, stubby, with huge domes implanted with doe-eyes the size of planets. Capcom, Sega and SNK all adopted the SD look for their fighting franchises – remember *Virtua Fighter Kids* (pictured below)? Oh, and MSX-owning Hideo Kojima fans should try to locate a copy of *Snatcher SD*.





Interesting fact
Rick has made cameo appearances in a few videogames over the years. Kid Chameleon can pick up a Rick Taylor Halloween mask on his travels; and at the end of stage two of *Kid Dracula* (Game Boy), the protagonist gets to face-off against a Rick SD doppelgänger.

Nintendo has always marketed its machines as avenues for light, wholesome family-fodder. So porting an arcade game about a possessed freshman slaughtering an army of darkness with a meat cleaver might have proved a problem. Nevertheless, Namco's Splatterhouse did make it onto Nintendo's 8-bit machine, well in Japan at least. So how did they get around the gore and those ungodly freaks? Easy, they pumped them with Botox.



» How convenient that the gravediggers put the dead bodies in chronological order, even down to the time of day the poor saps died.

メガ駆動機構

Sonic and Tails, Toejam and Earl, The Bonanza Bros… the Mega Drive wasn't short of a few surreal double acts in its lifetime, and perhaps no pairing ticked the peculiar box better than a brooding parapsychologist student and a power-giving Mayan hockey mask. Namco's iconic videogame-nasty *Splatterhouse* began life inside arcade dens back in 1988 and symbiotically wrapped itself around two consoles before finding Sega's 16-bit host. In 1990 the TurboGrafx-16 (aka PC Engine) blessed us with a shamefully watered-down *Splatterhouse* arcade port, and despite its 1992 Mega Drive debut going under the moniker of *Splatterhouse 2* – a sequel which many argue is more a reinvention than a follow-up – the second time Rick Taylor donned the Terror Mask was for his home console debut on the Nintendo Famicom three years earlier.

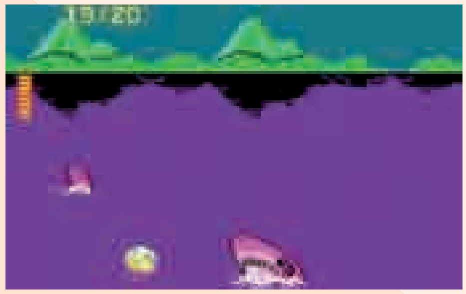
You'd never imagine a developer would release a fighting game where combatants fought each other using only friendly hand gestures, for the same reason that you wouldn't expect Namco to release a *Splatterhouse* game and skimp on the gore. But for its home console debut that's exactly what happened. Adopting the SD (Super Deformed) appearance and littering the levels with non-haemorrhaging horrors, *Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Graffiti* forewent the heavy blood-letting the franchise had become well recognised for. It was a decision that could have proved a dicey direction for Rick's relatively new videogame career. Ardent splatterhounds would see their hulking hero sleep in the NES hotbed, but forced to wear a frightening pair of pyjamas he might never be able to change out of.

Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Graffiti – which translates as 'naughtiness graffiti' – begins with a dead Rick, and a lovelorn Jennifer mourning

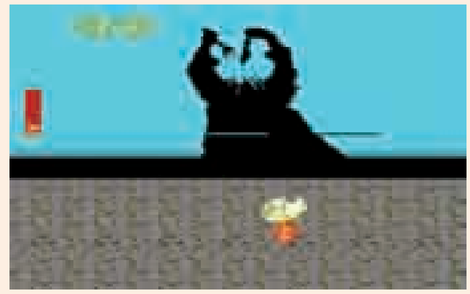
N PROMISE



» The operation was a complete success. The patient vowed never to eat a satsuma whole ever again.



» No prizes for guessing what this section is parodying. That's right: *Flipper.*



» Ah, so that's how the headless horseman lost his head… he was peckish.

over his grave. As a game where the main character is brown bread before you've even clasped a joypad probably wouldn't prove a very enjoyable nor lengthy experience, it isn't long before a bolt of lightning strikes down onto Rick's headstone and our hero is resurrected. However, a happy reunion between the couple is cruelly cut short by another surge of electricity which awakens Rick's neighbouring grave dweller, The Pumpkin Prince. As the majestic orange squash emerges from his soil, he kidnaps Jennifer, leaving a royally miffed Rick the job of reclaiming his damsel and wanting to etch out a few extra holes in the devious jack-o-lantern.

With this perfect tongue-in-cheek scenario to work with, Namco had a blank cheque to go wild and amble in more parodies, more randomness and more wackiness than any other in the series. *Splatterhouse* was, after all, built on pastiches, a fact it wore brazenly over its face. Rick shared an uncanny resemblance to a certain weak-swimming campsite killer and the enemies, bosses and locations provided joyous videogame *déjà vu* to any avid horror aficionado who slotted their lose change into its grisly cabinet. Finding inspiration from iconic films like *Friday The 13th*, *Poltergeist* and the *Re-Animator* series, it was a franchise that nailed the foreboding feel of gritty, grindhouse cinema and later became an important influence in shaping the survival horror genre.

To perhaps appeal more to the NES market, Namco diluted the tangible, side-scrolling hack-'em-up approach and adopted more of a platform nuance to the game. Rick's adventure found him bouncing-off bookshelves, interacting with the environment and warping to secret worlds. The enemies, although comically bloated, still spat menace; and despite being unable to masticate them into bleeding, bloody messes, they still emitted that trademark splatisfaction when you erased their existence. You could split a sludge monster, batter a radioactive mouse against a sewer wall and blast a shotgun shell into the mouth of a fire-spitting priest and his absconding torso. The twisted collaboration of sprites the game dished up offered a transfixing uncertainty to proceedings, as did the imagination and creativity that went into its levels.

The game's seven stages brimmed with cinematic satire – from the *Alien* chest-bursting sub-boss to the *Jaws* homage on the Camp Diamond Lake stage, leading into the game's most obscure boss parody: a cutlery-brandishing spectre with a subtle similarity to *The Burning*'s scissor-killer. *The Fly*, *The Exorcist*, even the suburbs of *Halloween*'s Haddonfield was given the *Splatterhouse* treatment.

The whole game comes together in a nice little package right at the end, with a twist ending that gives further explanation for the parodies, and clues as to where it fits in the series' timeline. Don't worry though, this article is spoiler free, so we won't be leaking the game's ending to you.

Splatterhouse: Wanpaku Graffiti provides a unique back-lot tour of terror. Its scenario of bounding from one side of the screen to the other, re-deadening the dead with a butcher's best friend, didn't rely much in the way of literary direction. This results in a hugely playable, text-light import title that is sure to resurrect a few fond memories for horror and splatter fans alike – without having to get struck by lightning, of course.



» Despite its cute look, the game still manages to squeeze some warped imagery into its levels. How did they ever manage to get floating apples past the censors?



» The game contains a lot of toilet humour; and at some points, actual toilets.

私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

Year released: 1987 (Japan)

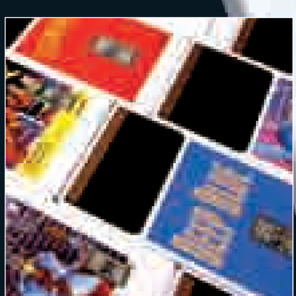
Original price: $200 (US TurboGrafx-16), $250 (US TurboDuo)

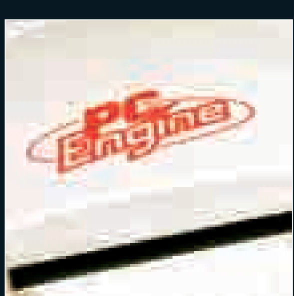
Buy it now for: £25-£30 loose (original white PC Engine), £60-£100 (Duo)

Associated magazines: Turboforce, DuoWorld (US), Marukashi PCE, Gekkan PCE (Japan)

Why the PC Engine was great… It was no bigger than a packet of crisps and played host to some truly awe-inspiring arcade conversions, as well as being responsible for some amazing technical innovations – it was the first home console to exploit the medium of CD-ROM, for example. A system with more hardware iterations than most people have had hot dinners, the convoluted PC Engine family tree would give even the most ardent genealogist a serious headache, yet it remains close to the hearts of hardcore gamers worldwide thanks to its lustrous design and dazzling range of first-class software.









RETROINSPECTION

PC ENGINE

INCREDIBLY SUCCESSFUL IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN AND A FIRM FAVOURITE WITH WESTERN IMPORTERS, NEC'S PC ENGINE IS NOW 20 YEARS YOUNG. TO CELEBRATE THIS EVENT, DAMIEN MCFERRAN PULLS ON HIS BEST TIME-TRAVELLING TROUSERS AND FLINGS HIMSELF INTO A WORMHOLE, HOPING TO EMERGE UNSCATHED IN 1987…

Western gamers tend to consider Nintendo and Sega as the two major players in the 16-bit console war. On European and American soil this was certainly the case, with the Super Nintendo and Mega Drive battling it out for supremacy. The story was slightly different in Japan, however. Nintendo remained amazingly successful but it was NEC's PC Engine that emerged as its main rival, leaving Sega to make do with a disappointing third. Remarkably, this popular Japanese console struggled in the US and bypassed Europe altogether. Unravelling the complex lineage of this intriguing system isn't straightforward thanks to numerous hardware amendments, name changes and add-ons – not to mention the involvement of three different parent companies – but by thunder, we're going to try.

Back in the late Eighties many companies – both inside and outside the videogame industry – observed the runaway success of Nintendo's NES/Famicom with mounting envy. One such corporation was Japanese electronics giant Nippon Electric Company, more commonly known as NEC. Established at the turn of the 20th Century to produce telephone components, NEC had gone on to become one of the world's leading computer manufacturers. A new conquest was beckoning in the form of the lucrative console market and while NEC undoubtedly had the financial clout to enter this arena, it lacked vital industry experience. Approaches were made to several leading videogame studios for support and it was soon discovered that Hudson Soft – the first developer to obtain a licence to develop for the Nintendo Famicom – also happened to be tentatively exploring the possibilities of producing its own system.

Founded by brothers Yuji and Hiroshi Kudo in 1973, Hudson didn't start out in the field of interactive entertainment. "They originally began by selling telecommunication devices and some art photographs," comments John Greiner, President of Hudson Entertainment in the US. "Within two years they began selling computer-related products and soon afterwards, the company started to make games. In fact, they were the first to publish a PC game in Japan." Hudson had created the high-powered LSI chipset but didn't possess the necessary cash to enter the console race alone. "They realised they needed a partner to manufacture and market to a large base. Fortuitous timing landed NEC as a company that was interested in entering the console market." This highly promising union would result in one of the most successful and influential Japanese consoles of all time.

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

In terms of aesthetics the PC Engine must surely rank as one of the most iconic designs in the history of electronic entertainment. The original white system was

Trainspotting

Hudson founders Yuji and Hiroshi Kudo happen to be massive fans of locomotives, even going as far as to name their company after one. "The name was inspired by the Hudson train – a type of steam locomotive used primarily in America – which was a childhood favourite of the brothers," recollects John Greiner. "The train used to run through the Japanese town where the boys grew up. The year the company started, that train was decommissioned. After Hudson's financial success, the brothers bought the train and had it restored. It ran its route of yesteryear through their hometown and became a big tourist attraction. In fact, over the years, the Hudson train has become part of the Hudson company mythos. At one point, Hudson's research centre had a miniature rideable replica of the Hudson locomotive that ran through the building; and to this day, the front mantle of the Hudson train sits in the lobby of our main office in Sapporo."



"WHILE NEC HAD THE FINANCIAL CLOUT TO ENTER THE CONSOLE ARENA, IT LACKED VITAL INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE"

RETROINSPECTION

PC ENGINE





» The complete SuperGrafx library in all its glory. Superb ports of *Daimakaimura* and *1941* are balanced out by some truly dire original titles.

petite and attractive, making rival consoles look positively ugly in comparison. "Hudson and NEC wanted to create a system that was appealing in design," Greiner continues. "The previous generation of consoles felt more like toys, so they wanted to create a system that was sleek yet powerful." With dimensions of 135 x 130 x 35mm, it remains the smallest home console ever made. This appeal was further augmented by the unique delivery system for software, as Greiner recalls: "The PC Engine used a unique chip-on-board media instead of cartridges. These credit card sized HuCards, or Turbochips as they were called in America, were marvels in design. They were extremely durable, portable and cool."



» SNK fans were happier than pigs in muck when the Arcade Card was released – these admirable ports made use of the increased RAM the card bestowed.

"WITH A SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH OUT OF THE WAY, NEC SOON SET ABOUT CREATING WHAT WOULD BE THE FIRST OF MANY HARDWARE UPDATES: THE 'CD-ROM2' ADD-ON"

The slender size of the machine belied the impressive technical specifications contained within. The custom-built dual 16-bit graphic processors (HuC6260 and HuC6270A) allowed the PC Engine to display stunning arcade-quality visuals. Remarkably, the unique HuC6280A CPU that powered this minuscule wonder was 8-bit – a fact that would provoke many playground arguments about whether or not the machine should be classed in the same league as true 16-bit consoles like the SNES and Mega Drive.

NEC launched the PC Engine in Japan on 30 October 1987 and by the end of the subsequent year it was the best-selling console in the country, dethroning the Famicom in spectacular fashion. One of the key reasons for this triumph was impressive third-party support, which previous consoles like Sega's Mark III (known as the Master System in the West) had struggled with, largely thanks to Nintendo's stranglehold over software developers. Striking technical specifications combined with the rampant enthusiasm shown by NEC and Hudson – two highly respected companies in Japan – encouraged many developers to support the console.

Namco, Irem, Masaya, Konami and Human all flocked to the PC Engine banner, bringing some of their most treasured franchises with them. Amazingly, permission was also secured to port several highly esteemed Sega coin-ops, including *After Burner II*, *Power Drift*, *Space Harrier*, *Out Run*, *Wonderboy III* and *Fantasy Zone*. These were proficiently reprogrammed by internal studio NEC Avenue (later known as NEC Interchannel, and more recently Interchannel-Holon, as the company is no longer affiliated with NEC) and ironically they frequently outclassed Sega's own efforts on the Mega Drive.

With a successful launch out of the way, NEC soon set about creating what would be the first of many hardware updates: the 'CD-ROM2' add-on. "At the time, publishers were constrained by the cost and memory of carts," Greiner remembers. Released in 1988, the CD-ROM2 came with a fetching briefcase-style set-up and remains one of the most desirable pieces of PC Engine paraphernalia for collectors. Early CD software was hampered by lack of RAM but this was thankfully rectified via a series of 'System Card' updates (which came in HuCard form and granted more usable memory). This in turn gave birth to the renowned 'Super CD' criterion, which allowed programmers to be more flamboyant and really put that additional CD storage space to meaningful use. "NEC and Hudson were driven by what a CD could bring to gaming: amazing sounds, robust animation, and seemingly unlimited storage space," confirms Greiner.

Commitment to largely unproven CD-ROM technology showed that NEC intended to remain on the cutting edge, but in 1989 this burning desire to innovate resulted in a near-fatal error of judgement.



» John Greiner, President of Hudson Entertainment in the US.



» NEC reprogrammed several notable Sega coin-ops – some would argue that the PC Engine versions eclipse the Mega Drive alternatives.





» Adverts like this one – taken from the pages of C&VG – helped whip up interest in the UK.

Despite the runaway success of the PC Engine, Nintendo's Famicom remained the console to beat and when solid information regarding the specifications of its successor began to surface in the Japanese press, NEC panicked. It rashly decided to launch a new console and the SuperGrafx was born. Essentially a PC Engine with additional graphic chips and four times as much RAM, this bulky machine was handicapped by the fact that it utilised the same 8-bit CPU as its older stable mate. Co-ordinating the extra chips created a massive drain on processing power and developers struggled to



» Force feedback for your buttocks? The Virtual Cushion must rank as one of the most bizarre peripherals ever.

achieve satisfying results. Incredibly, only five dedicated games ever saw the light of day (in addition, a 'hybrid' version of *Darius Plus* was released that would also play on a standard PC Engine). Thanks to an impressive conversion of Capcom's *Daimakaimura* (known to us as *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*) and excellent overall compatibility (it's able to play HuCard games and can be connected to the CD-ROM drive, making it the only machine in the PC Engine dynasty with the potential to play all available software), the SuperGrafx remains a highly sought-after collector's item, regardless of its abject commercial failure.

GO WEST

In spite of this slight hiccup, success for the PC Engine was virtually assured on home soil. With proven technology and a library of excellent games, it made perfect sense to unleash the console Stateside, as Greiner recalls: "The US market was stirred into a fevered state by fans wanting a true gaming upgrade from the 8-bit era." NEC's American arm rechristened the machine the 'TurboGrafx-16' and the external casing of the diminutive console was retooled in order to make it look more substantial and imposing. Nevertheless, the fortunes of the TurboGrafx-16 stood in stark contrast to that of its Japanese sibling. "The success of the PC Engine was undeniable in Japan, where at one point it captured nearly a third of the market," states Greiner. "In the US however, it was a different story." Sega released the Mega Drive (renamed 'The Genesis') in North America at almost exactly the same time and began relentlessly and ruthlessly marketing its new console, as Greiner remembers: "Sega were hard-hitting, gaining an irreverent edge which best suited the US demographics." The early promotions for the Genesis were extraordinarily successful and the selection of available software – which not only included some of Sega's key arcade titles but was also more tailored to a Western audience – gave it the edge.

NEC's machine was lumbered with a very 'Eastern' assortment of games and Hudson struggled to craft titles that would appeal to US players. "It was a tremendous challenge launching so many games in such a short time frame," recalls Greiner. "That is why you initially saw so many games that were ported from Japan and from genres that were most popular in that country, like shooters." Nintendo's dominance over third-party developers became apparent once again, with American software companies being just as fearful of Nintendo's wrath as their Japanese counterparts. "Unfortunately,



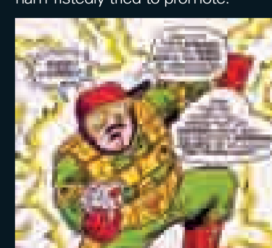
» Owning a PC Engine LT grants you access to the elite of collectors – the machine is rare and very expensive. You only need one kidney, after all.



» NEC envisaged a wide range of applications for its 8-bit wonder – sadly, most of these ideas were canned as it became clear that gaming was the future of the PC Engine.

Go Johnny, Go, Go, Go

To support the release of the TurboDuo, TTI commissioned a series of adverts featuring a freelance crime fighter named Johnny Turbo. Dedicated to defeating the nefarious forces of the malevolent Feka Corporation, Johnny used his special powers to educate the gaming populace of America about justice and truth – the truth being that the Feka system was not a dedicated 'all-in-one' CD system, like TTI's TurboDuo. The adverts were shoddily concealed attacks at Sega, who had just released the Sega CD add-on for the Genesis. While Sega's promotional campaign was cool and original, the Johnny Turbo adverts were notoriously cheap and ever so slightly petty – the key issue being that Sega had never actually insinuated that the Sega CD could function without the Genesis. They have since become part of videogame folklore, with many gamers ironically remembering the adverts better than the product they ham-fistedly tried to promote.





» Unsurprisingly, American box art was excruciatingly bad.

"NEC'S MACHINE WAS LUMBERED WITH A VERY 'EASTERN' ASSORTMENT OF GAMES AND HUDSON STRUGGLED TO CRAFT TITLES THAT WOULD APPEAL TO U.S. PLAYERS"

PC ENGINE

"IN JAPAN, THE AMAZING SUCCESS OF THE FRESHLY RELEASED SUPER FAMICOM PROVOKED NEC TO CONSOLIDATE THE EXISTING PC ENGINE HARDWARE IN THE FORM OF THE DUO SYSTEM"

Hardware History

Few machines can boast as many hardware upgrades as the PC Engine. From 1987 to 1994 NEC produced a massive range of systems based on the '87 technology. The original white console was restyled slightly in 1989 to create the CoreGrafx – technically identical but with AV output instead of RF (the CoreGrafx II followed in 1991 but was only cosmetically different from its predecessor). The same year saw the release of the 'Shuttle', which boasted a gimmicky design but bizarrely lacked the ability to connect to the CD-ROM2. The CD-ROM2 and Super CD-ROM2 add-ons allowed users to play cutting-edge CD titles, and the portable PC Engine GT and LT bestowed a modicum of mobility. The 'Duo' system also saw hardware revisions, the first being the Duo-R (1993) that had a different case and more streamlined components. The Duo-RX (1994) proved to be the final throw of the PC Engine dice and was identical to the Duo-R, save for the bundled six-button joypad.



ESSENTIAL WEBSITES

www.pcengine.co.uk
www.pcenginefx.com
www.tzd.com
www.turbomemoirs.com



» NEC Avenue's *Space Fantasy Zone* looked promising but sadly never saw release. Thankfully a working ROM exists.

while Hudson created many great games for the system initially, it still wasn't enough. Many of the big name brands from other publishers simply couldn't be published," continues Greiner. In a similar situation to that witnessed in Japan, Nintendo stipulated that if a third-party game was produced for the NES, it couldn't be released on a rival console. "That became a challenge that was not easily overcome," Greiner reflects, mournfully. Nintendo's bullying tactics were later found to violate US anti-trust laws but by then it was too late.

To make matters worse, NEC vastly overproduced its hardware. "They listened closely to retailers, who were very aggressive in their belief that 16-bit gaming was going to be a big success," explains Greiner. "NEC therefore over-ordered units and this proved fatal in the long run as they committed tremendous financial resources to create the hardware, which ultimately handcuffed them in marketing spend. Sega were able to successfully steal market share away with a 'bad-ass' image and an unfettered marketing bankroll."

The seemingly unbridled success experienced in Japan had sadly eluded NEC in America. "Arguably, the TurboGrafx-16 had better games, but a number of missteps took place when it came to hardware styling, box art, pack-in and release schedule," comments



» Predating the Xbox *Steel Battalion* controller by over a decade, the monstrous SuperGrafx 'Power Console' featured full steering yoke, gear stick, throttle and numeric keypad. The SuperGrafx slotted in the back of this fearsome beast. It never got past the prototype stage.

Greiner. "Marketing and understanding the US gamer mentality was always a challenge for NEC."

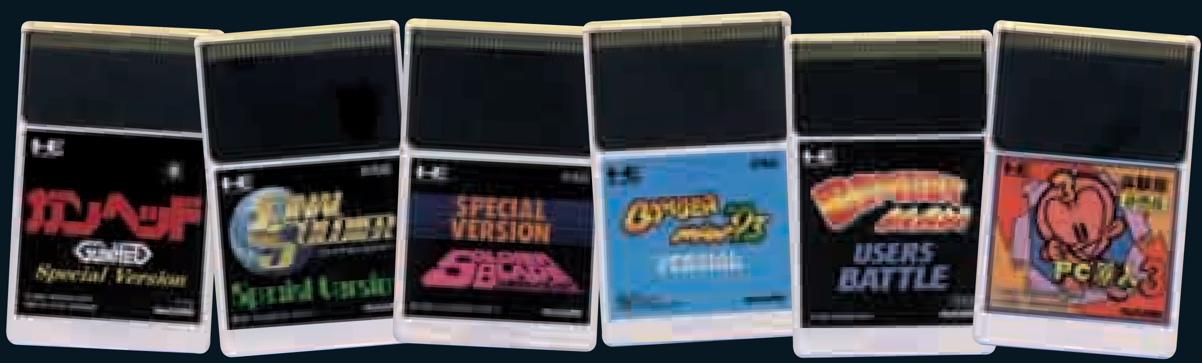
Around this time there were faint rumblings of a European release for the PC Engine. Early in 1990 it was revealed that a UK company called Mention were intending to sell specially modified machines that would circumvent the various problems UK importers were experiencing. Known as the PC Engine Plus, this slightly altered system did not have the official blessing of NEC and unsurprisingly never took off. Despite several magazines reporting that NEC themselves were 'literally months away' from officially launching the console in the UK for 'under £100', it never happened. "Europe was neglected as this was NEC's first foray into the console market," comments Greiner. "However, there was considerable grey market penetration as Europeans also wanted to participate in the new gaming revolution".

THE DYNAMIC DUO

Back in Japan, the amazing success of the freshly released Super Famicom provoked NEC to consolidate the existing PC Engine hardware in the form of the Duo system. As you might expect from the snappy moniker, this was a PC Engine and CD-ROM drive combined. The need for (easily misplaced) System Cards was also negated as the Duo had the necessary RAM built in. Launched in 1991, the machine arguably represented the zenith of the PC Engine brand. A US release followed via the newly founded Hudson/NEC venture Turbo Technologies Incorporated (TTI for short), but the rebranded TurboDuo suffered the same ignominious fate as the TurboGrafx-16 before it – despite having some excellent software, it failed to gain a significant market share and faded quickly. Incredibly, it's recently been confirmed by a former TTI employee on fan site



» The CD-ROM2 add-on came with its own briefcase to house it and the console – here a CoreGrafx II version.



» The legendary 'HuCard' was similar to Sega's 'MyCard' format for the Mark III console.



» The TurboExpress attempted to do battle with the Nintendo Game Boy. The screen was excellent and it could play HuCard software, but poor battery life and a high price point rendered it uncompetitive.

www.pcenginefx.com that the company was offered exclusive home console rights to Midway's arcade hit *Mortal Kombat*, but the head office in Japan decreed that fighting games were oversubscribed in the US and neglected the offer.

The success of the Japanese Duo allowed NEC to further strengthen its position, applying intense pressure on Nintendo with a series of excellent titles whilst keeping poor old Sega firmly in third place. Classic games like *Dracula X*, *Gate Of Thunder*, *Star Parodia* and *The Legend Of Xanadu* proved that even in the relative infancy of the CD-ROM age, the extra space afforded by the format could be put to sterling use. Fortunately, the humble HuCard was not forgotten and a noteworthy conversion of Capcom's *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* pushed the maximum capacity of the credit card-sized format up to a muscular 20 megabits.

1994 saw the introduction of the Japanese-only 'Arcade Card', which increased the PC Engine's power to previously unimaginable levels. Slick coin-op conversions of *Fatal Fury Special*, *World Heroes 2* and *Art Of Fighting* soon appeared and while these incredibly faithful ports won the console a whole new group of admirers, they came too late to make a truly telling impact. The 16-bit party, which the 8-bit PC Engine had skilfully managed to gatecrash, was beginning to wind down and a new wave of powerful 32-bit behemoths loomed ominously on the horizon. Sales started to dwindle, forcing NEC and Hudson to develop a successor – the ill-fated 32-bit PC-FX. Built around the rather misguided belief that FMV-style games represented the future of the console industry, it unsurprisingly flopped at retail.

After nearly a decade of unwavering commitment to one another, NEC and Hudson finally parted company in the middle of the Nineties. The former went on to supply the graphical muscle behind Sega's Dreamcast and the latter continued to produce games for a wide range of consoles.



» The PC Engine Shuttle ranks as one of the more unusual – some might say pointless – hardware modifications made available.

SPECIAL THANKS TO John Greiner and John Lee of Hudson Entertainment for taking part in this feature and Aaron Nanto of www.pcenginefx.com for providing exclusive hardware photos.

INTERVIEW WITH KEN WIRT



To get a better idea of the problems faced by NEC when it came to launching the TurboGrafx-16 in the US, we spoke exclusively to one of the key people behind the operation. Ken Wirt served as Vice President and General Manager of the TurboGrafx-16 Group at NEC Home Electronics from 1989 to 1991 and was responsible for many of the decisions made in regards to releasing the system in America.

When were you made aware that NEC intended to release the PC Engine in the US?
Almost right after I started at NEC as Vice President of Strategic Planning, NEC released the PC Engine in Japan and it did quite well there. Then in the fall that year there was a request to bring the machine to the United States. So from that time it took us about a year and a half in order to be able to do that.

What factors influenced the name change to 'TurboGrafx-16' and why was the tiny PC Engine redesigned as a larger machine for the US?
Well I think you have to go back to the time period – this was the early Nineties. Prior to the launch we did some market research with customers in the US and we found that the name PC Engine caused quite a bit of confusion. I think in Japan the name was okay because it's kind of an American phrase and that had some cachet. In the US, PC Engine was literally interpreted by customers as Personal Computer Engine. In regards to the restyled shape of the machine, it was going to be sold at a relatively high price and the customers we asked questioned why something so expensive should be in such a small package. They believed that if it's small it should cost less, not more. Of course today in the 21st Century we understand that smaller things sometimes cost more and you pay a premium for that advantage. The name change came about because we tested a number of different options and the one that did the best was the one that described the main benefit of the product, which was the graphics. Hence the name: TurboGrafx-16. The 16 related to the 16-bit graphic chips inside the machine.

How did you market the machine?
Well in terms of marketing of the product we knew it was a little more expensive because of the technology – quite a bit more expensive than what people had been used to paying for game machines, in fact. We also knew that we had peripherals coming out in the future such as the portable version – The TurboExpress (PC Engine GT in Japan) – and the CD-ROM drive that would be really quite expensive. So what we attempted to do was to position it as a high-end gaming machine for the kind of customers that had maybe grown up with the NES and were graduating to a more advanced system. Because these kids were older they would feel like they could spend more money on it. It wasn't like today though, where there's a real adult market for gaming. We viewed this as kind of the older teenager crowd, so Nintendo was for people below the age of 16 and we're trying to go for 16 to 22, sort of when you graduate college, as the target market for TurboGrafx-16.

How did NEC view the rapidly emerging Sega?
We certainly had our eye on Sega. In Japan the PCE had a big advantage over the Sega Genesis because it was out about a year before. In the US I believe the TurboGrafx-16 and Genesis launched within about ten days of each so there was no year-long advantage. In the US we knew that Sega would have strong software because they were developing games themselves. They also had experience in the US market with their Master System and they had licensed games too, so we knew they would be a force to contend with. We were actually more concerned about Sega than we were about Nintendo. Sega was very focused on licensing and they had *Joe Montana Football* and that was a great game on the Genesis. The games that were on TurboGrafx-16 typically did not have licences. We tried to get some but needed to go back to Japan for approval and in those days licensing did not play a big role in the success of the product in Japan. We had a tennis game that was pretty good but we wanted to get a tennis star to put their name on the game, so we worked out a deal with Pete Sampras. This is before he won any major tournaments, but we could tell he was an 'up and comer' as he'd just won the national championship for juniors. We drafted out a deal for him to be the star in our tennis game for $25,000. Ironically we couldn't get approval from Japan, not because of the amount of money involved but because they didn't believe in licensing. So we had *TV Sports Tennis* instead of *Pete Sampras Tennis*.

What are your memories of the US launch?
We launched it with some commercials that turned out to be quite controversial. The first set of TV ads tried to capture the excitement and speed that TurboGrafx-16 delivered. One of them showed a teenager playing TurboGrafx-16 alongside a goldfish bowl and when the teen began playing, the fish started swimming faster and faster. Bubbles started to appear, like the bowl was heating up, and the fish eventually jumped out because it was so hot. We had a similar one with cats – they also got very animated by the TurboGrafx-16 and were bouncing off the walls. This generated a fair amount of controversy among animal activists who thought that we were harming animals – in fact it was all done with computer graphics, which was much less common back then than it is now. Today people would probably guess it was CGI, but back then they wrongly assumed we were actually boiling the water with the fish in it, which I can assure you we did not do! Anyway, there were enough complaints directed to Toys 'R' Us management that they made a strong request that we pull those commercials, which we eventually did.

Another interesting anecdote involves a game from Japan called *PC Kid*, which featured a character who would go around and hit things with his head. In the US, a slang term for hitting something is to 'bonk' it, so we renamed the game *Bonk's Adventure*. Of course in England to 'bonk' means something entirely different, so our advertising campaign for this title got a lot of attention in Europe. We even had a commercial campaign in the US with the slogan 'Bonk for President' and that was printed on T-shirts and other marketing materials. I think if eBay had existed at that time you would have seen a lot of sales in the UK for those shirts!

The TurboGrafx-16 struggled against Sega and Nintendo. What steps were taken to rectify this situation when the TurboDuo was launched?
After period of time we realised that there was a major cultural difference between the US and Japan that impacted the financial nature of the business. In Japan children get money for gifts, typically at New Year's time. It's their money and they can spend it however they want to. So if you have a very expensive games system, that's okay – if the kids want it and they have enough money, they'll buy it. In the US, of course, it's a very different dynamic. Kids still get presents around Christmas time but the parents buy the presents. Parents are very hesitant to spend a big amount on videogame systems, so we had a much tougher time selling the high-priced technology to parents in the US than selling the same thing to children in Japan. As a result we had to lower the price of the product and that put a lot of margin pressure on it. Because of the way the business was structured – with Hudson manufacturing the HuCards, sending them to NEC who then shipped them onto the US – there were mark-ups at each stage. It made the product too expensive. So to simplify the business model and reduce the cost to the consumers in the US, TTI was created. It basically let Hudson – the majority owner of TTI – manufacture the cards and sell them in the US at a lower price, which increased the volume and made the business healthier.



PC ENGINE

PERFECT TEN GAMES

With so many marvellous HuCard and CD-ROM titles available, it's hard to pick ten 'essential' games. The pieces of software we've complied here show just how varied a library the PC Engine possesses.



01

R-TYPE

» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **PUBLISHED BY:** HUDSON
» **CREATED BY:** HUDSON/IREM
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** LEGEND OF HERO TONMA

01 **Irem's legendary horizontal shooter is widely regarded as one of the PC Engine's most accomplished conversions and is credited with being something of a 'killer app' in the early years of the machine.** Astoundingly accurate in terms of graphics, sound and gameplay, the only drawback is that it had to be split in two parts as it wouldn't all fit on one HuCard – so the PC Engine *R-Type II* isn't actually a sequel as you might imagine, but the final levels of the game. A CD-ROM release set things straight and put everything on one disc, but collectors will want to seek out the dual HuCard editions for their attractive packaging.

SPLATTERHOUSE

» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NAMCO
» **CREATED BY:** NAMCO
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GALAGA '88

02 **Although it's inferior to the superb FM Towns Marty conversion, this commendable port remains a fantastic replica of the gloriously gory coin-op.** It's so close to the original that you really have to run them in tandem to spot the differences. Supremely playable to boot, the Japanese version continues to command respectable (but not extortionate) prices on the open market. The American TurboGrafx-16 edition, which was sadly censored upon release, is less desirable. Unfortunately it's this version that has recently been released in the US and Europe on Nintendo's Wii-based Virtual Console service. Boo.



02

GEKISHA BOY/ PHOTO BOY

» **RELEASED:** 1992
» **PUBLISHED BY:** IREM
» **CREATED BY:** IREM
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** IMAGE FIGHT

03 **This is easily one of the most novel and innovative PC Engine titles.** Photo Boy is a budding paparazzo tasked with taking compelling shots throughout several different environments. Using the on-screen cross hair, you must take snaps of various objects and events whilst avoiding obstacles along the way. Graphically this is one of the most attractive titles available, packed with colour, detail and stacks of personality. Sadly, like many must-have PC Engine games, it's worth a pretty penny these days. An updated version exists for the PS2 and was released in the West as *Polaroid Pete*.

DRACULA-X – RONDO OF BLOOD (CD)

» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
» **CREATED BY:** KONAMI
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DETANA! TWIN BEE

04 **Grill any hardcore *Castlevania* fan on their favourite instalment and they'll most likely say *Symphony Of The Night*.** Press them a little harder and they may also mention *Rondo Of Blood*. Boasting stunning graphics, impressive anime cut-scenes and an excellent musical score, it's a game no self-respecting PC Engine owner should be without. Unfortunately, its lofty reputation keeps second-hand prices exceptionally high (around £100). An updated PSP version is due for release later this year.

STREET FIGHTER II DASH – CHAMPION EDITION

» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NEC
» **CREATED BY:** NEC/CAPCOM
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FIGHTING STREET (CD)

05 **Most gamers know the superlative SNES instalment of this classic brawler.** The fact the PC Engine conversion is as good (if not better) is testament to the power of NEC's machine. Visually, it's hard to distinguish it from the SNES version and the sampled sound is better. It cries out for a six-button pad and multi-tap (sadly the PC Engine only has one joystick port). It's hard to believe that an 8-bit console is capable of such an accurate conversion. Second-hand copies aren't too steep either.



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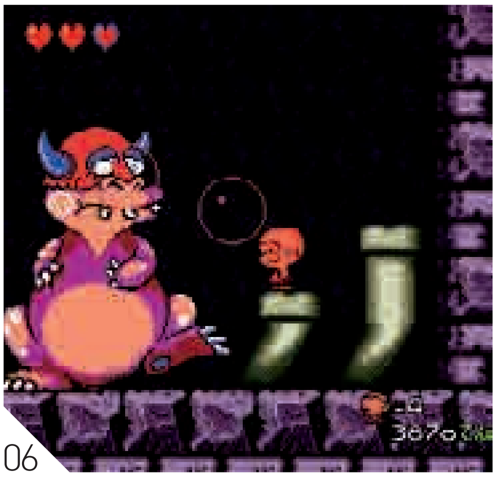


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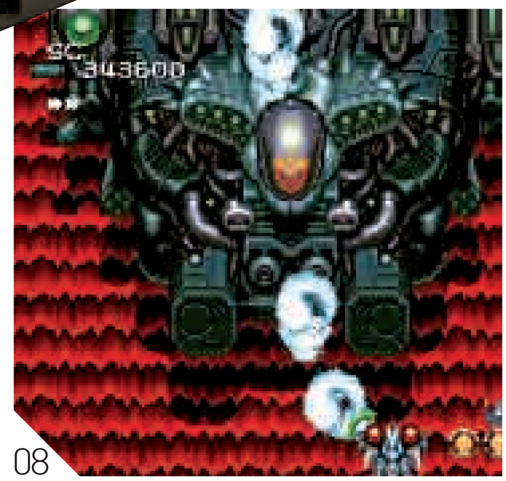


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08

PC KID/BONK'S ADVENTURE

- » **RELEASED:** 1989 (JAPAN)
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** HUDSON
- » **CREATED BY:** RED/ATLUS
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GATE OF THUNDER

06 Sega had Sonic. Nintendo had Mario. NEC had PC Kid, or Bonk as he was known In the US. A cave boy with a penchant for head-butting things, PC Kid became a firm favourite with gamers worldwide, though not quite as famous as Sonic or Mario. Two incredibly successful sequels followed as well as a futuristic shooter spin-off called *PC Denjin* (*Air Zonk* in the US). Interestingly, the failure of the TurboGrafx in the US meant that Hudson continued to support Nintendo's hardware, so PC Kid also appeared on the rival NES, SNES and Game Boy. The turncoat.

YS BOOK I & II (CD)

- » **RELEASED:** 1989 (JAPAN)
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** HUDSON
- » **CREATED BY:** NIHON FALCOM
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DRAGON SLAYER

07 The large amount of text to translate and general consumer apathy towards the TurboDuo meant that very few of the brilliant Japanese RPGs created for the machine ever made it to Western shores. Thankfully, those that did were of a very high quality and *Ys I & II* arguably ranks as the most impressive of the bunch. While it's not the prettiest game you're ever likely to play, the atmosphere, storyline and soundtrack are second to none. Amazingly the Western script and voice acting are both first-class, which rather goes against the grain of the time. This CD-ROM release remains massively engaging and highly recommended.

SEIREI SENSHI SPRIGGAN (CD)

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** NAXAT SOFT
- » **CREATED BY:** COMPILE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ALESTE

08 Software studio Compile sadly no longer exists, but has left a striking legacy – including this awesome Super CD blaster. A close relative to the equally brilliant Mega Drive *MUSHA Aleste* and Mega CD *Dennin Aleste* (*Robo Aleste* in the UK and US), this mecha-based vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up is as slick as they come. Blisteringly fast and packed to bursting point with stupefying detail, *Spriggan* qualifies as an essential (albeit expensive) purchase. It's worth noting that the sequel, *Spriggan Mk2*, wasn't programmed by Compile and isn't a patch on the original, despite some nice visuals.


09

GOMOLA SPEED

- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** UPL
- » **CREATED BY:** UPL
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ATOMIC ROBOKID

09 We featured this quirky little game in our Full of Eastern Promise section a few issues back. It's hard to adequately describe, as there really hasn't been a game quite like it before or since. You control a caterpillar-like creature that has to encircle food in order to exit each level. Enemies are also dispatched by surrounding them, and can be stunned temporality with bombs. It's one of the truly essential pieces of PC Engine software and can thankfully be picked up for less than a fiver these days. It's rumoured that the team behind the game were head-hunted by Nintendo soon after it was published, which is hardly surprising. A truly superb title that mixed strategy and puzzle elements to great effect.

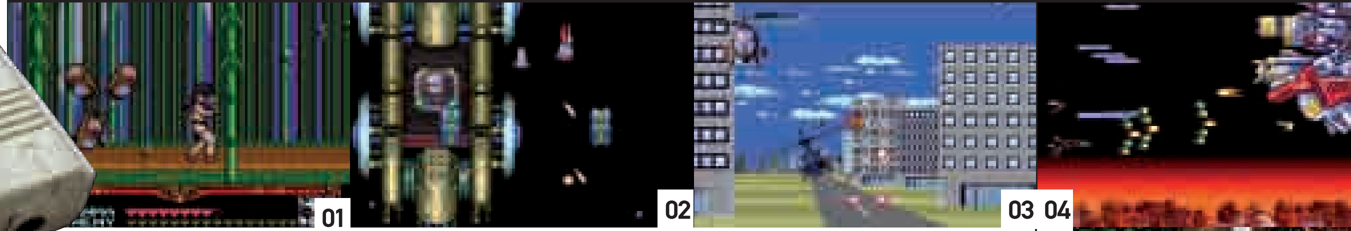
BOMBERMAN '94

- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** HUDSON
- » **CREATED BY:** HUDSON
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BOMBERMAN '93

10 It simply wouldn't be sporting to discuss the best games of the PC Engine without mentioning what is arguably Hudson's most famous creation. Bomberman has appeared in several games on NEC's 8-bit machine and while all are excellent (with the possible exception of *Panic Bomber*, which was a fairly lacklustre puzzler), this edition is the most accomplished of the bunch. The traditional explosive-related malarkey is all present and correct, but here we also see the introduction of innovations such as animal steeds and new characters for the near-essential multiplayer mode. It was ported to Sega's Mega Drive under the highly original name *Mega Bomberman* in 1994.


10





PC ENGINE
and the rest…

It may be a shoot-'em-up fan's dream machine, but there are still plenty of great games available for NEC's miniature wonder that cover a variety of different genres. Here's a selection of the very best and worst that the machine has to offer.



01 RANMA 1/2
02 FINAL SOLDIER
03 THUNDER BLADE
04 AERO BLASTERS
05 F1-PILOT
06 OUT RUN
07 WALLABY
08 KIKI KAI KAI
09 ALIEN CRUSH
10 KLAX
11 SKWEEK
12 WORLD COURT
13 HATRIS
14 MAGICAL CHASE
15 BLUE BLINK
16 DIE HARD
17 MOTO ROADER
18 SOLDIER BLADE
19 KYUKYOKU TIGER
20 CHAN & CHAN
21 GUNBOAT
22 PC KID
23 THE KUNG FU
24 LEGENDARY AXE
25 ALTERED BEAST
26 BLOODY WOLF
27 DUNGEON EXPLORER
28 GUNHED
29 THE NEW ZEALAND STORY
30 CORYOON
31 SPLATTERHOUSE
32 PRINCE OF PERSIA
33 WORLD JOCKEY
34 1943 KAI
35 BARI BARI LEGEND
36 DRAGON SPIRIT
37 GOMOLA SPEED
38 ADVENTURE ISLAND
39 JACKIE CHAN
40 BOMBER MAN '94
41 GALAGA '88
42 RABIO LEPUS SPECIAL
43 SHANGHAI
44 BATTLE LODE RUNNER
45 DEVIL CRASH
46 RAIDEN
47 CIRCUS LIDO
48 FANTASY ZONE
49 KNIGHT RIDER SPECIAL
50 NINJA WARRIORS
51 RASTAN SAGA II
52 MR HELI
53 POPULOUS
54 WONDER MOMO
55 SHINOBI
56 BATMAN
57 F1-CIRCUS '91
58 DON DOKO DON
59 OPERATION WOLF
60 FINAL MATCH TENNIS
61 TWIN BEE
62 SUPER ADVENTURE ISLAND
63 PARODIUS
64 TIME CRUISE
65 VICTORY RUN
66 PARASOL STARS
67 BIKKURI MAN WORLD
68 IMAGE FIGHT
69 R-TYPE
70 NINJA SPIRIT
71 TRICKY
72 BATTLE ACE
73 SPACE HARRIER
74 TV SPORTS BASKETBALL
75 AFTER BURNER II
76 MAKAI PRINCE DORABA CHAN
77 SALAMANDER
78 PC KID 2
79 YU YU JINSEI
80 POWER DRIFT
81 VIGILANTE
82 HANATA KADAKA
83 STREET FIGHTER 2: CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION
84 PAC-LAND
85 ZIPANG
86 SCHBIBIN MAN 3
87 PUZZNIC

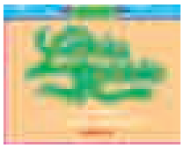



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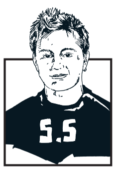
LIBBLE RABBLE

THERE'S NOT MUSHROOM IN 'ERE





- » **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
- » **RELEASED:** 1983
- » **GENRE:** PUZZLE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10+



HISTORY

From the genius puzzle-bending mind of Toru Iwatani (creator of *Pac-Man*) came the obscurely named *Libble Rabble* in 1983, a weird and wonderful mushroom farming simulator. As to what the name actually means, we'll come to that in a minute.

In the early Eighties, videogame designers' imaginations were way ahead of the technology, so ensuring each arcade machine had some form of enrapturing dynamism often fell to tinkering with the hardware and control systems. Not that *Libble Rabble* brought barriers crashing down, but the unusual dual-joystick control method was something of a head scratcher at first; however, it soon connected player and game in a very active way.

Not entirely dissimilar to Taito's 1981 game *Qix*, the player controls two arrows with a finite piece of 'string' joining them together. By moving the arrows around the playfield (each being controlled by its own joystick), coin droppers were required to form a loop around mushrooms on the screen in order to harvest them, while avoiding the nefarious hoodies (who look remarkably similar to the ghosts from *Bubble Bobble*). Capture a hoody in a loop and they're sent back to the den at the top of the screen, *Pac-Man* style.

The playfield has a gridwork of poles, around which the string wraps itself to create shapes and loops so goodies can be collected. A distinct Pac-Man effigy passes across the screen regularly, acting as an annoying pair of scissors to cut your string and knacker the loop you've been trying to fathom around those irksome, if cutesy, mushrooms.

After ten minutes it suddenly occurs that you're fully in tune with the arrows and the game speed reaches a heated level of strategy and speed combined to make *Libble Rabble* a true, unappreciated classic of the arcade puzzle genre.

Now, the reason it's called *Libble Rabble* is absolutely incredible, and will change the way you think about videogames for ever. *Libble Rabble* means… oh no, I've run out of space!



Whatever happened to...

PAC-MAN VR



AFTER EXPOSING THE INNER WORKINGS OF VIRTUALITY A COUPLE OF ISSUES BACK, WE DECIDED TO INTERROGATE FORMER STAFF MEMBER DON MCINTYRE ABOUT ONE OF THE COMPANY'S MORE FASCINATING PROJECTS. DAMIEN MCFERRAN LIFTS THE LID ON THE HITHERTO UNTOLD STORY OF THE NEVER-RELEASED PAC-MAN VR.



» Pac-Man is such a great character.

NEED TO KNOW

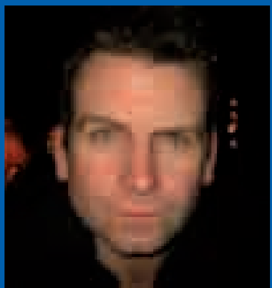
SYSYEM:
ARCADE

DEVELOPER:
VIRTUALITY

START OF DEVELOPMENT:
1996

DATE OF CANCELLATION:
1997

VERSION PLAYED BY RG:
UNFINISHED BETA



» Developer Don McIntyre.

Few videogame characters can boast the enduring fame of Namco's seminal Pac-Man. Urban legend suggests that he was conceived when creator Toru Iwatani was staring at a pizza with one slice missing, and since then this jovial yellow blob has gone on to become one of the videogame industry's most recognisable mascots. It's testament to Pac-Man's lasting appeal that he's still seen as a bankable commodity even today. The famous lineage has given us over 30 different instalments since the release of the original *Pac-Man* arcade machine in October 1979, but few people are aware that Namco's figurehead was also involved in a sadly unfulfilled venture that could have changed the fortunes of not only a company, but an entire hardware concept.

As was reported back in Retro Gamer issue 38, the dawn of the Nineties saw the boffins at UK firm Virtuality establish themselves as the foremost experts in the new-fangled realm of virtual reality. Sadly, by the middle of the decade this once-proud company was in dire straits. The general public had become largely disinterested in the technically impressive but unconvincing VR hardware and it was clear to those within the struggling group that a really ground-breaking piece of software was required – something that would invigorate the flagging business by winning the hearts and minds of gamers worldwide. With this in mind, the decision was made to approach one of the industry's veteran studios in the hope that they would grant access to one of the most famous and popular intellectual properties on the face of the planet.

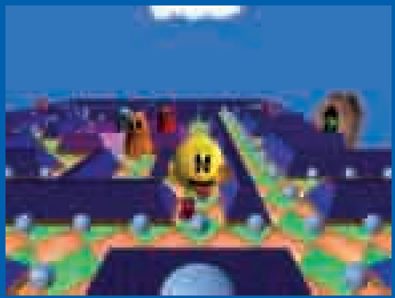
Scottish-born Don McIntyre worked as a 3D artist at Virtuality during this tumultuous period. The game in question, if you hadn't already guessed from the opening paragraph of this feature, was a virtual reality interpretation of Namco's legendary *Pac-Man*. But how was Virtuality able to secure this



» Ah, we like blue skies in games. They make the 'voices' stop.

deal, given the traditional scepticism shown towards Western developers in Japan?

"We had an office over there and I believe the Director arranged the deal," explains McIntyre. "At the time we did have a team in Japan, so there were already a few established links." The team in question had, in fact, previously worked on several



» Considering he's hounded by ghosts for all eternity, Pac is certainly a jolly fellow.

VR projects in The Land of the Rising Sun. "Software had already been developed in conjunction with Sega [see 'Tec-nical Hitch' boxout] and there was a definite plan to become more involved with the Japanese game market" states McIntyre, who is well aware just how remarkable it was for Virtuality to secure such a prestigious licence: "It was quite a coup really, looking back," he adds. It was blatantly clear to all involved that the promise of seeing such an admired character in a VR title had the potential to revitalise the fortunes of the waning firm and, more importantly, restore the battered public interest in the notion of 'immersive gaming'.

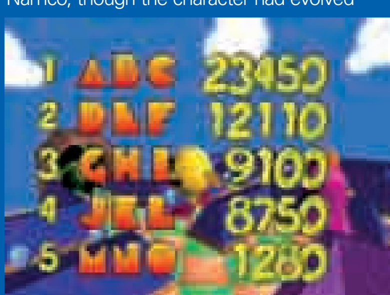
It's somewhat ironic given the respectable age of the *Pac-Man* franchise that it proved to be the perfect assignment for a virtual reality facelift. "Of all the popular arcade games of the last 20 years, *Pac-Man* was



» Pac-Man is about to pop his cherry in this X-rated screenshot.

particularly suited for the immersive VR environment," explains McIntyre. "There was a maze, which meant players were immediately aware of movement limitation and the concept was fundamentally simple." The fact that the gaming public were familiar with the mechanics of the game also helped to circumvent issues that Virtuality were having regarding the somewhat 'alien' nature of the whole VR concept. "These were arcade machines, so users had three to four minutes to familiarise themselves with navigation, environment and objectives," McIntyre says. "Everyone was familiar with *Pac-Man*, so there was less experimentation required by the user."

Considering the rather sketchy reputation of the technology and the incredible stature of the licence involved, one would have expected parent company Namco to oversee such a development with an oppressive and chokingly overbearing presence. Remarkably, this couldn't have been further from the truth and the Japanese software giant pretty much left the design team in the UK to their own devices. "We were given a style guide by Namco, though the character had evolved considerably in the years leading up to our involvement" comments McIntyre. "There were fairly tight guidelines in terms of colour – but we had free reign with elements like facial expression, animations and props. From a creative perspective, we had very little to do with the Namco team – they allowed us an extraordinary amount of freedom."



» It's the high score table that few would see, let alone enter their names into.

McIntyre and fellow developer Andy Reece locked themselves away in Virtuality's Leicester HQ and began the intense process of shoehorning the traditional *Pac-Man* experience into a VR frameset. Unsurprisingly, the main problems encountered during the development period were related to the technology involved, as McIntyre remembers: "The biggest issue was with the navigation. The game was deployed in our 'stand-up' VR system, which had a tracked headset and a handheld trigger. We went through a number of navigation alternatives, which employed one or both devices, but we eventually arrived at two options. Do you move the same way you are looking, or do you steer with your hand?" As is the case with a lot of things in life, the team realised that a compromise was in order. "I think we ended up with a combination of the two," says McIntyre.

Although the ultimate aim of the game remained faithful to the original – gobble the pills whilst avoiding the attention of the pesky ghosts – McIntyre and Reece were pleasantly surprised to discover that by using the fledgling technology they could expand on the original concept in somewhat unexpected ways. "The game was played from Pac-Man's point of view" explains McIntyre. "This was great because although you could see a plan view of the map, you were never too sure where the ghosts were. When you turned a corner and were suddenly confronted by a ghost it was quite alarming. We could also play with the height of the maze walls by shrinking Pac-Man in size, which you obviously can't do in the top-down 2D original."

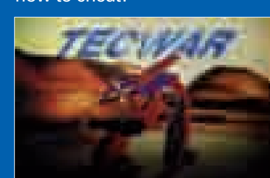
This ultimately made for a much tenser and more exciting experience and the time-honoured pill collect-a-thon of old began to evolve into something else entirely. "Playing from Pac-Man's viewpoint actually turned the game into more of a 'first-person shooting' title and less of a strategy game," explains McIntyre. Nothing too ground-breaking by today's standards of course, but it should be noted that this was well before FPS titles had become as depressingly commonplace as they are now. "At this time the *Wolfenstein 3D* craze was only just gaining traction and *Doom* had yet to become properly established," recalls McIntyre, aware that he and Reece were on to something quite revolutionary and noteworthy.

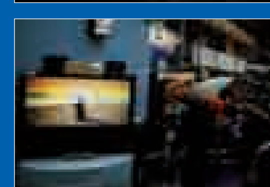
The freedom granted by Namco meant that there were plenty of ideas the team were keen to incorporate into the game, but McIntyre is man enough to admit that some were less successful than others. "We had big ideas for the second and third levels of the game, which if I remember correctly were loosely based on an Aztec temple and a castle respectively," he says. It was a case of pushing the original brief a little too far. "Looking back, I'm not sure we really thought this through. The reason why *Pac-Man* worked in its original form was the simple, geometric layout," admits McIntyre.

Although back in the late Nineties, 3D visuals were still relatively crude compared to what we're accustomed to these days, the graphical muscle behind Virtuality's units had undoubtedly come on leaps and bounds by the time *Pac-Man VR* was being created. "The 'stand-up' machines were DX2 66MHz PCs with a whopping 32 meg of RAM. The

TEC-NICAL HITCH

Prior to developing *Pac-Man VR*, Virtuality worked with Sega on a mech-based virtual reality arcade game called *TecWar*. Speaking to www.system16.com, programmer Andy Reece explains the history behind this game: "*TecWar* wasn't well received at the Japanese AOU show, partly because it wasn't actually that good compared to other games from Sega and partly because people didn't 'get' it. It was kept alive due to a good showing at the GiGa arcade in Ikebukuro. Unfortunately the stocks of Model 1 boards, which were no longer being produced, were depleted with the release of *Star Wars*. Only 70 arcade units were made from the remaining stock. As far as I know they were only released in Japan, except for one machine I played years later in a Sega arcade in the basement of Hamley's toy store. I got all the way to the end of the game with only a single credit, basically because I knew the game inside and out and knew how to cheat!"





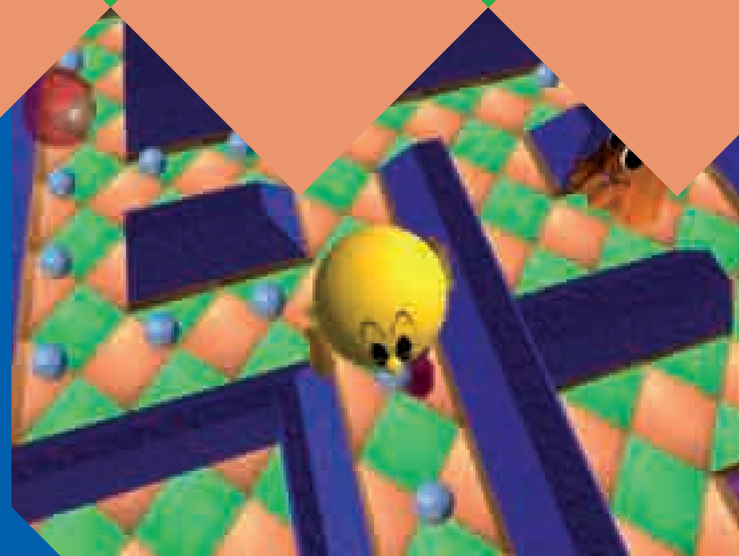
"OF ALL THE POPULAR ARCADE GAMES OF THE LAST 20 YEARS, PAC-MAN WAS PARTICULARLY SUITED FOR THE IMMERSIVE VR ENVIRONMENT" DON MCINTYRE

Whatever happened to...

PAC-MAN VR



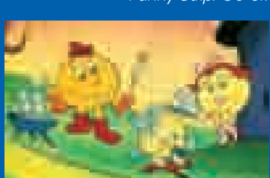
» This shot gives an excellent impression of what it was like playing from Pac's point of view.



» No wonder Pac-Man always has a smile on his face – there's more pill-popping going on here than at a hippy convention.

PAC'S PROGRESS

Since his birth in the late Seventies, Pac-Man has starred in a wide variety of different games, as well as his own Hanna-Barbera animated TV show. Although the first follow-up – which saw the introduction of Pac-Man's spouse and was imaginatively titled *Ms. Pac-Man* – retained the 'pill collection' format of the original, several subsequent sequels have deviated slightly when it comes to core play mechanics. 1984's *Pac-Land* (which was largely based on the aforementioned TV series) introduced platform elements, for example. More recent titles – such as *Pac-Man World Rally* and *Pac 'n Roll* – make use of the characters only, placing them in completely different genres altogether. The success of the original arcade machine also inspired a flood of clones and bootlegs, the most notable of which are *Hangly-Man, Piranha, Munch Man, Lock 'n' Chase* and, last and most definitely least, the sexually explicit *Funny Strip*. Oo-er.



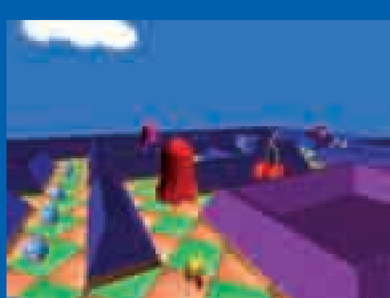
fancy bit was the custom graphics card – it had a couple of PowerPC chips on it and was able to literally throw out tens of polygons," chuckles McIntyre.

The staff had also gained a massive amount of experience by this point, thanks to around half a decade of rapid software development. "We'd learned the tricks of the trade by this stage," says the Scot, with a degree of satisfaction. As the project progressed, so too did the visual power behind Virtuality's units. "We upgraded to 'off the shelf' 3dfx cards running on a fairly standard DX2 machine," McIntyre remembers. "The shift to dedicated graphics cards made all the difference."

Even so, corners still had to be cut in order to make the game look attractive and eye-catching. "Like all game developers at the time, we had to be fairly creative and economical in terms of game design," says McIntyre. "Rather than loading in 3D geometry, much of the environment was created in 3D then texture-mapped to simple polygons. For instance, Pac-Man's body was a yellow sphere that was rendered, then applied as a map. We used an early version of LightWave to develop the 3D graphics, in conjunction with some loaders that were written in-house. "As the graphics slowly began to come together, other elements of design process brought out the perfectionist in McIntyre: "I can remember it took me ages to get Pac-Man's 'run' exactly right – I think Andy Reece was ready to lamp me at one point! Thankfully, it worked out okay in the end."

The original *Pac-Man* could be a stubbornly challenging beast at the best of times, but the reality of utilising the largely misunderstood VR technology meant that McIntyre and Reece were forced to water down the difficulty somewhat. "We made the game a little easier," he admits. Whereas the original game was born in the days when gamers sought to register the most impressive high scores possible and could literally spend hours stood at the same arcade machine, virtual reality technology had to deliver a satisfying experience in the space of just a few minutes. Prolonged play wasn't an option, especially when befuddled amusement arcade operators were keen to get as many people through the doors as possible in order to recoup the massive cost of purchasing and running the incredibly expensive Virtuality pods. "We had to give players a sense of achievement relatively quickly, as all our machines had to at that time," McIntyre explains.

Although the development process for all projects at Virtuality was undeniably intense



» When playing as mini Pac-Man, the walls tower over our hero, creating a great sense of tension.



» Pac-Man takes a moment to consider his pill-collecting options.



» Looking up at the pills, you can admire the lovely reflections of the maze.



» The hungry yellow fellow legs it away from that pesky ghost.

and gruelling, both McIntyre and Reece were still able to find time for some light-hearted moments in order to alleviate the stress. "We almost always hid something in the games," relates McIntyre. "*Dactyl Nightmare* and *Dactyl Nightmare 2* – two of Virtuality's earlier titles – both had hidden gems. Sadly I don't think we had the opportunity with *Pac-Man VR*." That's not to say McIntyre didn't have any ideas ready, of course: "I think I suggested putting the character in a kilt at one point, which received a predictably negative response!"

As development drew to a satisfactory close, the Virtuality team decided to take the game on the road in order to gauge the all-important public opinion. It was tested at a variety of different locations, including a local university. "I can remember testing the system in Leicester DeMontfort University with a bunch of students," recalls McIntyre. The reaction *Pac-Man VR* received confirmed the Scotsman's faith in the game and amid the resultant frenzy it became glaringly apparent that they were on to a winner: "We almost started a riot in that place. Word spread that we were there and the queue ended up snaking around the building at one point. Guys came back 20 or 30 times – which was always proof to me that it worked."

"THE QUEUE ENDED UP SNAKING AROUND THE BUILDING AT ONE POINT. GUYS CAME BACK 20 OR 30 TIMES – WHICH WAS ALWAYS PROOF TO ME THAT IT WORKED"
DON MCINTYRE

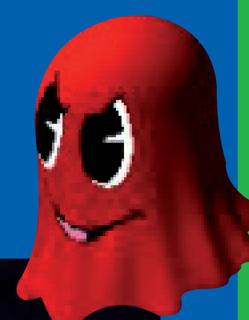
Thanks to the phenomenal response the game received wherever it was tested, confidence in the almost-completed product was at an all-time high. Everything was coming together beautifully – the team had successfully updated the classic *Pac-Man* concept, they had utilised the often-misunderstood virtual reality technology in a satisfactory manner and the public testing had gone down a storm. All that was required was some final tidying up of the code and the game would be ready to roll out into arcades worldwide, surely gaining unrivalled public acclaim and saving Virtuality's bacon in the process.

Tragically, just as the finish line was in sight, McIntyre and Reece were hit with the worst possible news. After a string of failed deals and a worrying lack of capital, the firm had no option other than to close its doors. All internal development was stopped, including work on the near-complete *Pac-Man VR*.

For McIntyre and Reece it really couldn't have come at a worse time. "We were literally weeks away from full release when the company folded," McIntyre says mournfully. However, the Scot is a realist and admits that as promising as the game unquestionably was, it probably wouldn't have been enough to extract Virtuality from the rather large hole the company had found itself in. "Even if it had been published, it's unlikely that it would have made any difference," he admits.

He feels that the company had the perfect chance to save itself the previous year with a game that was inexplicably ignored by the gaming public. "*Buggyball*, which was a great game written by Martin Brownlow [currently at Swingin' Ape Studios in Aliso Viejo, California], was supposed to be the great white hope and was released a year earlier to general consumer apathy," recalls McIntyre. "We kind of felt that if anything could have saved the organisation software wise, that would have been it."

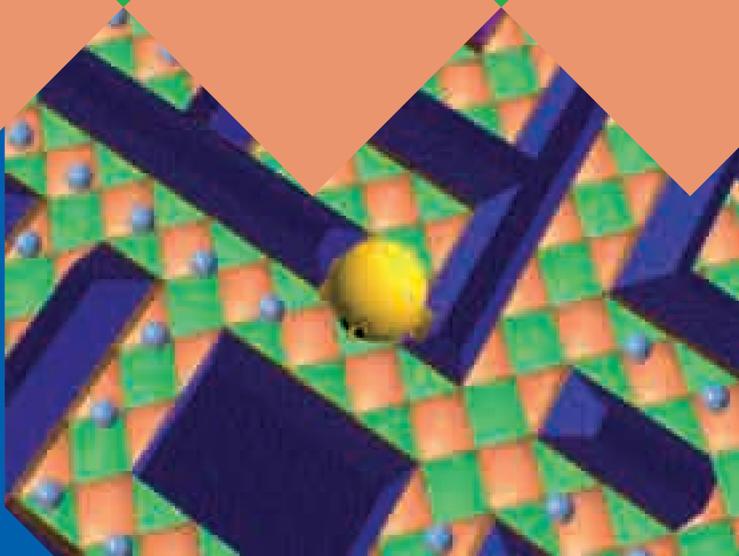
As unfortunate as Virtuality's demise was, it didn't actually come as much of a shock. "Most of us saw it coming and had things lined up" McIntyre reveals. "It was sad though, as the technology was years ahead of its time and there were some enormously talented people there. Looking back, we were on the cusp of an enormously exciting period for games and technology." However, there was no time to mourn for the fallen company and the talented Scot quickly found other employment: "I moved to London and got into 3D and web-related stuff – many of the





» Would you argue with a mascot of that size and stature?

Whatever happened to...
PAC-MAN VR



» This top-down angle is reminiscent of the classic arcade original. It's not the player's perspective though.

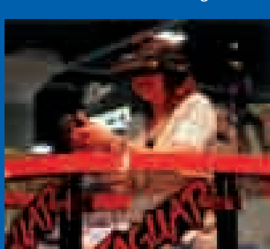


» When your lives, or the time limit ran out, it was time to Pac it in.

"THE GUYS WORKING WITH THE GRAPHIC CARDS AND CHIPS WERE LITERALLY PROGRAMMING IN THE DARK"
DON MCINTYRE

VIRTUALLY YOURS

Just in case you missed our Virtuality feature back in issue 38, here's a brief summary of the company. Established in 1987 by Dr Jon Waldern, W Industries (as it was originally known) was one of the first firms to bring location-based virtual reality to gamers worldwide. The visuals were crude but the concept struck a chord with the media and general public – at least until the 32-bit generation came along. Things got sticky as the Nineties drew to a close and the company closed its doors in 1997 thanks to mounting debts and lack of investor interest. Along the way, Virtuality assisted Atari with its never-released Jaguar VR headset and also produced an immersive update of the classic *Missile Command*. Amazingly, VR has been all but forgotten – at least in the sphere of interactive entertainment. And to think that we all fervently believed that it represented the future of videogames…



other guys went to games companies, both here and in the US."

When the VR bubble burst, Virtuality's inventory was sold off in chunks to numerous different parties around the globe – mainly small-scale arcade operators. Since then, several other companies have advertised a range of Virtuality VR pods for sale and have even included *Pac-Man VR* in the list of available software – quite puzzling when you consider that it was never actually finished. Keen to get to the bottom of the confusion, we got in touch with some of these companies and attempted to get an official response regarding the actual playability of the game in question. Predictably, we received no reply. When informed of this, McIntyre was amused but not altogether surprised: "I'm guessing the software was sold off when the company was broken up. It certainly wasn't finished and I would imagine anyone other than Andy or I would have a hard time tying up all the loose ends." It's highly likely that the version of *Pac-Man VR* these firms possess is little more than the early demo that was showcased at DeMontfort University, and is therefore a long way off being the finished game.

Although the Virtuality team has now splintered and gone onto bigger and better things, there's still a sense of brotherhood there, as McIntyre attests: "I'm still in touch with many of the Virtuality guys, including Matt Wilkinson at Activision and Derek Pettigrew – another, far more talented Scot – at StrawDog Studios." He's in little doubt about why his fellow co-workers have gone on to make big names for themselves all over the globe. "I don't think it's an accident that the guys have all gone on to be successful in their various ventures, as Virtuality was a real baptism of fire," he recalls. But what lessons did McIntyre himself learn whilst working on projects like *Pac-Man VR*? "Like many



» To ensure people didn't hog the machines for too long, a time limit was used, shown by the gauge at the top of the screen.



» Pac-Man hungrily goes for another line of pills, but he'll have to find a way past the gang of ghosts to reach the others.



» After eating a power pill, Pac-Man's out to eat some ghosts.

game and interactive developers of the time, we were very much 'learning on the job' – which is an underrated activity. There were no project plans or technical specifications – there was also very little documentation to go along with the hardware. The guys working with the graphic cards and chips were literally programming in the dark."

There can be few things in videogame development that are more disheartening than seeing a project you have poured your heart and soul into fail to even make it to the marketplace, but that crushing disappointment can only be amplified when you know full well that what you've produced is of a fantastically high quality. However, McIntyre shows none of the bitterness and resentment he is entitled to display, and actually retains very fond memories of the time spent on *Pac-Man VR*. "It was an exciting, frustrating and rewarding time," he says with a smile. "The high expectations, long hours and frantic approach served us all well in the future."

SPECIAL THANKS

Thanks go to Don McIntyre for taking part in this feature and to Toby Broyad of www.system16.com for the *TecWar* screens.

ZEKE JUST KICKED THE BUCKET!



» The enormous, impressive Pan Amusements range at Warner Brothers Movie World in Madrid.

Arcades were home to more than just videogames. Each one was a vibrant, multicultural community of entertainment delights, and king among them was the animated Hillbilly lightgun range. Retro Gamer's Spanner recently had the privilege of visiting Pan Amusements and spoke to managing director Paul Whittaker about the wonderful life of the animated shooting gallery.

Pan AMUSEMENTS

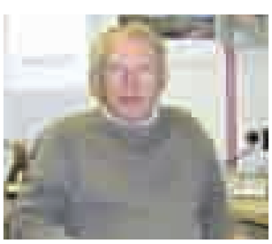
» Pan Amusements – pioneers of the old arcade front.

Rides never really bothered me. Sure, I'd go to Blackpool Pleasure Beach and suffer the long and winding queues for the Steeple Chase, the Cat & Mouse and the Revolution, but that was never the appeal of that surreal place. It was simply the atmosphere; the deafening siren song of mechanics gone mad, the nonstop thunder of overhead rollercoaster tracks, the raucous laughter of the policeman in the glass box, a cacophony of one thousand arcade machines beating in unison, the rabid screams of a nation on holiday and there, in the background, usually accompanied by a thin jet of water down the back of your neck, was the familiar redneck twang shouting, "Looks like Zeke just kicked the bucket!"

The *Hillbilly* shooting range was a staple diet for any arcade dweller, but what's particularly remarkable about those incredible machines is that almost every single animated electronic lightgun shooting range you've ever seen was made by just one Oldham-based company, Pan Amusements.

"The first time I ever saw a shooting range was in America in 1978. I thought it was a superb idea, but the one I saw was awful. The build quality was nonexistent. They'd used bent nails and old washing machine parts as active components!" begins Paul Whittaker, the polite and unassuming founder of Pan Amusements, a man whose working life has been filled with the enviable task of designing and building arcade games for almost 30 years.

Originally trained as a high voltage electrical engineer, at the age of 23 Whittaker went to work for his father in the family trade. "My dad was a mechanic, and after the war the fairs and carnivals began circulating again. A couple of times, the carnival folk came to him asking for minor repairs to their machinery, midways, dodgems and so on. There were no parts available so soon after the war, so he had to make do with whatever he could get to make the repairs, and he built himself a good reputation for being able to fix all these custom machines," recalls Whittaker. To an average guy in the street (such as myself) as well as the average carnival and arcade lover (such as myself), it's quite incredible and inspiring to hear someone talk so casually about such a mysterious entertainment industry, but to Whittaker and all the workers at Pan



» The man with his finger on the trigger at Pan Amusements, Paul Whittaker.



» Looks like Zeke just kicked the bucket!

"THE HILLBILLY AND WILD WEST SHOOTING RANGES BECAME SOMETHING OF A FAMILIAR AND EXPECTED FEATURE OF LARGER ARCADES"



» Designing a new shooting gallery begins with the creation of concept artwork based on the theme requested by the client.

Amusements, arcades are a normal part of everyday life.

He continues: "That's when he decided to start building his own amusement machines. Coin pushers, pin machines, small shooting galleries; that sort of thing. I went to work for him when I was a lad, but then I set up on my own when I was 27." Inspired by the shoddily built range Whittaker had seen in America, Pan Amusements' first ever animated lightgun gallery was built into a huge trailer and taken to the UK's largest and most celebrated annual fair, the Nottingham Goose Fair. The event only lasted for four days, so Whittaker knew his shooting range needed reliability from the outset – downtime was not an option when facing off the huge number of competitors. Fortunately, his experience in building for the carnival-going public meant this first shooting range set the high standards for many that were to come, both in design and dependability.

The *Hillbilly* and *Wild West* shooting ranges became something of a familiar and expected feature of larger arcades, but a closer examination of these impressive galleries reveals a distinct manufacturing difficulty: where the hell do you buy a toothless redneck mannequin or a full-size moonshine jug?! Whittaker explained.

"Well these days eBay's a real godsend, and we've got people who keep a close eye on the listings. Before then, we used to take trips over to America and trawl through taxidermy suppliers and prop makers. There's some incredible places out there: taxidermy outlets the size of B&Q, where we can pick up all this US paraphernalia that we build into the ranges. And prop making is big business out there too, so we'd stock up on mannequin parts whenever we went."

Walking around Pan Amusements' extensive workshop is a surreal experience. In many ways, it resembles



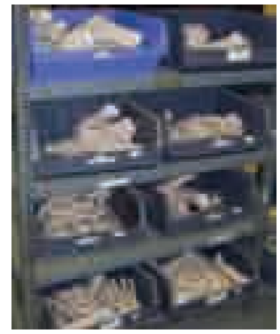
an average British factory floor, separated into recognisable areas such as a spray shop, packing section, stores and offices. Only here, the shelves in stores are filled with prosthetic hands, stuffed animals, tin jugs, hillbilly heads, buckets and all manner of other obscurities. In the spray shop, the painter isn't touching up a car panel, he's making a pirate's treasure chest look like it's been buried with a bottle of rum for 150 years. And the strangest thing of all is how normal all this is to the people who work there! But why wouldn't it be? Pan Amusements has been building these machines for over three decades.

"Essentially, the games work like a remote control on your TV," says Whittaker. "The guns send an infrared signal to the small targets dotted around the range. The code tells the game which gun just hit it, and reacts accordingly.

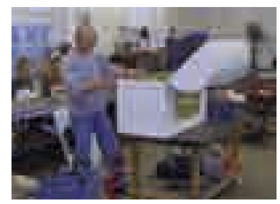
"Basically, the way our ranges work has stayed the same, but we're always improving it as new technology comes along. The audio samples used to be on infinite loop tape, but of course those degrade over time, especially on a busy site. These days we use memory cards, which are much easier to change and don't break down. The guns used to be machined by us, but again the wood didn't last as well as the glass-filled nylon rifles we have today."

But it's clearly this dedicated approach to providing a few minutes of fun to passing customers that's ensured Pan Amusements is still in business long after many videogame manufacturers have disappeared from arcade history.

"It's really about understanding how to provide people with a good game. A lot of the water shooting machines you see these days are too easy and too fast; players are just buying tickets and they've no incentive to keep playing. In Iran, where we recently installed a system, the average wage is $22 a week, so playing one of our games is very expensive for the public, and I want to make sure they enjoy it. Too many game manufacturers actually forget to make their games fun!"



» **Above:** Can someone give me a hand? The stores at Pan Amusements are a surreal place. **Above Left:** Losing your head can be a very literal problem at Pan Amusements.



» A treasure chest being built for a new pirate-themed range.



» The shooting gallery at the Roy Rogers museum, which is still run by Rogers' grandson.

QUICK DRAW

DESIGNING A PAN AMUSEMENTS RANGE BEGINS WITH ARTWORK.

"We have a conceptual artist who tries to capture the theme the customer asks for so they can choose the elements they want to include," explains Whittaker. "This can be quite precise. At the Asterix theme park in France, for instance, they have a guy whose job it is to ensure all the colours throughout the park are exactly right! Our range had to match his specs exactly.

"Then the designers and engineers brainstorm about how it will actually work and a small model is made at a scale of 1 inch to 1 foot. Once we've shipped the unit to the site, it takes three men about two weeks to install it."

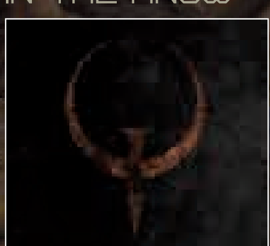
Since that first trailer game, Whittaker's teams have installed over 500 shooting ranges in 43 countries including America, Spain, Iraq, Iran, China, India and Russia. The Roy Rogers museum is the proud owner of a Pan Amusements gallery, and in Madrid a massive range (see main image) was housed in its own building featuring a saloon, jail house and prospecting site.

THE MAKING OF...

QUAKE

QUAKE IS NOT ONLY ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SHOOTERS OF ALL TIME, BUT ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL GAMES EVER MADE. ITS USE OF FAST, WHOLLY 3D ENVIRONMENTS AND REVOLUTIONARY MULTIPLAYER COMPONENT HAVE EARNED IT A PERMANENT (AND PROMINENT) PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF VIDEOGAMES. ALEXANDER GAMBOTTO-BURKE JOURNEYS BACK TO WHERE IT ALL BEGAN.

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** GT INTERACTIVE
- » **DEVELOPER:** ID SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** DOWNLOAD FOR $20

Any 3D action game made after 1996 owes its life, soul, and money to *Quake*. It's that simple. Id Software's seminal shooter revolutionised the games industry, making fully 3D spaces not only achievable, but fast and streamlined. It set the template that every FPS thereafter would imitate – thankfully, the depressing brown haze has finally been given the axe – and arguably remains one of the purest, most primal action experiences you can have on a PC.

Without John 'Insomnia' Carmack's flawless engine and the game behind it, the industry – not only games but also 3D hardware – would've taken a lot longer to advance. Which isn't to say, of course, that no one else could've come up with an engine as tight as *Quake*'s. But it's not just the game's sublime graphics engine that makes it so significant. It was the beginning of online multiplayer gaming, the progenitor of all modern first-person shooters, and the end of John Romero's tenure at the company he helped build – and the place where he made his most well-known games – id Software.

"It was," Romero says, without a hint of doubt, "super painful."

There's a reason his words aren't minced in the slightest: the *Quake* you know and love had to be assembled in seven months. Seven very tense months. Why? Well, in the year or so before id crunched down and created the game we'd see on shelves, *Quake* had a completely different design. Romero explains: "Well, back in '91, we'd just finished doing our *Commander Keen* series, which had put us on the map, with shareware and all that. And so we started to use that same engine to test a new idea.

"We really liked the name 'Quake' because Quake was a character in a D&D world that John Carmack had created, that we'd been playing in for a while. Quake was in this secret group called the Silver Shadow Band, and he was just this super-awesome dude with a big Thor-like hammer. And we were saying, 'Let's do an RPG! We'll make the main character Quake!' There was only some preliminary work done to see what we could do in that engine, and it was just not cool. A game called 'Quake' had to be so much cooler than this; a 2D, top-down RPG didn't seem right. So we were like, 'Nah, let's not waste it.'"

The idea was shelved. And, in the meantime, id went off to invent and popularise the first-person shooter genre with *Wolfenstein 3D* and *DOOM*. By the time id had completed *DOOM II*, gaming culture, technology and the company itself were completely changed, and the *Ultima* offspring that *Quake* was originally going to be seemed an even worse idea than it did in 1991. "So," Romero continues, "we all thought, 'Let's do a new game!' If you look at what we'd done, we'd started with *Commander Keen*, but after that we did a lot of different things. We did *Shadow Night*, which was a side-scrolling ninja game, we did *Dangerous Dave*, *Rescue Rover*, and then *Hovertank 3D*. Then, of course, *Wolfenstein 3D* and *DOOM*. So we kept creating new IPs, and this time we were like, 'We've got this cool new technology. It's time for *Quake*.'"

Little did Romero know when he said those last four words that they would end up swerving his career in a completely different direction. But at this point, he was too excited about where he wanted



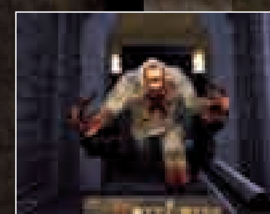
» Thanks to the haphazard design, *Quake* featured both medieval and futuristic elements.

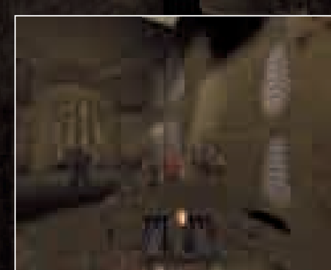


» Quake's lighting effects were extremely impressive for a game released in 1996.

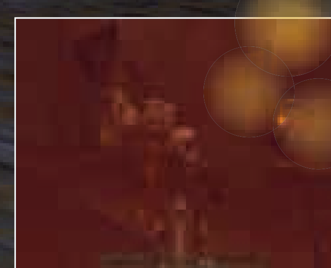
DARK PLACES

In 1999, as a testament to his firm belief that technology should be available to the people, John Carmack released *Quake*'s source code under the GPL. As a result, the still-thriving *Quake* mod community exploded yet again, now taking apart the very core of their favourite FPS. One of the most exciting results is the DarkPlaces engine, which blesses tired old *Quake* with advanced lighting and shader effects. If you still have a copy of id's classic on-hand, download the revolution at http://icculus.org/twilight/darkplaces/





» Zombie grunts - the linchpin of every evil army in an id Software game since *DOOM*.

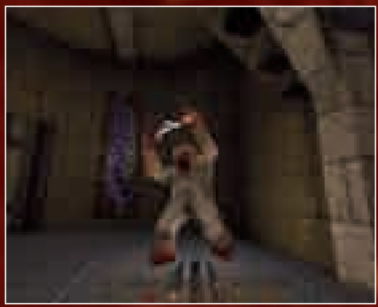


» Did I mention Quake had a lot of blood? Bet you didn't guess that.

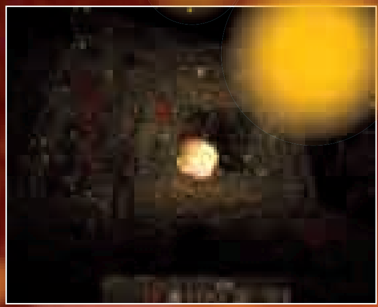
"QUAKE CREATED THIS GIANT COMMUNITY – PEOPLE WERE GETTING MARRIED THROUGH QUAKE" JOHN ROMERO

THE MAKING OF... QUAKE

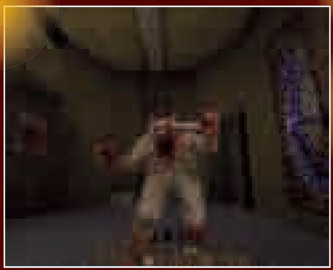




» "By the power of Greyskull, I have the power." The Shambler has a He-Man moment.



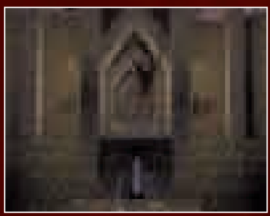
» When you weren't trying to killed get by *Quake's* many enemies, you were often mesmerised by all the purty colours.



» The Shambler: An over-sized misshapen teddy-bear? Yes. Run like Forrest regardless? Yes.

READY WHEN?

As most know, *Quake* took a little bit longer than expected to hit shelves, but this has come to be expected from id Software, whose famous phrase, "When it's done," is used as the standard release date for all projects. Many gamers have wondered over the years, though, whether id's nonchalance is just a PR gimmick, or the company genuinely has no idea when their games will be finished. Romero thinks it's the latter. "When I was there," he says, "it was totally 'when it's done.' The development environment at id isn't the kind you have at other companies, remember. Whether it's team money or publisher money, you've got to have deadlines because money runs out. But at a company like id, Epic, or even Valve, when you have money pouring in constantly, your focus can be 100% on quality."



to take that awesome name for a game. "By '95," he remembers, "it had nothing to do with the original RPG idea. The design had lots of different elements to it, but basically, it was a first-person exploration kind of thing. But when you got into combat, you could choose to go into a side-view fighter mode, or you could stay in first-person, but it wouldn't be as cool. Also, I had the idea of implementing visual triggers in the game, like where having you walk down a dark path in a forest, and you look at a cave, and all of a sudden some eyes appear, and there's growling. We had a lot of great ideas, none of which actually made it into the game."

That's because, in November 1995, Team id assembled and discussed *Quake*'s future. It was after this meeting that Romero decided his days at id were very numbered; that decision was arguably Ion Storm's genesis. "We all had a big company meeting," he recalls, "because the technology had been developed for a full year at that point, and we still didn't have a game. We had levels, but there was no clear direction, because we didn't like hiring up – well, I liked it, but Carmack didn't want to hire more programmers; he wanted to keep the team small. So, he tried to keep a low headcount, but in doing so we jeopardised our ability to prototype new game code. For the whole duration of the company, it was Carmack who did the cool new tech, and I who did the cool new design."

But things were changing in the Dallas-based company. Carmack's tech was taking precedence because it was so revolutionary, and when the team worked out what little time they had left to actually make Romero's game, they didn't feel too confident. "But I'd seen the development cycle go up 50% every game since *Wolfenstein*," he sighs. "So I was like, 'Guys, it's going to take longer! This is more sophisticated tech. It's not as if we don't have the money! Let's do something that's never been done before.' But most of the people who were arguing against it hadn't been on a full development cycle before; I really don't think the owner should've been listening, because their points were kind of invalid."

Regardless, the decision was ultimately made to take what the team had established in terms of levels and art design, and rework *DOOM*. Romero was disgusted. "I was like, 'That is so lame'," he laughs. "But that's basically when I realised, 'I'm finished here.' I went off and redesigned the game, handed everybody out the spec sheets for what they'd be doing with the new, revamped design, and it was all about total execution for seven months. In January, after getting it going, I called up Tom Hall, and said, 'I'm outta here after this game.' And that was the idea for Ion Storm."

Quake didn't end up being what Romero had wanted it to be, but that didn't stop him from making sure that it was the best damn *DOOM*-spawn possible. So, for the game's now-legendary monsters, the team studied Lovecraft. "I had been reading a lot of Lovecraft's stuff," he reveals, "and I was just amazed at how messed up it was. It was awesome; I couldn't believe someone back in the Thirties created this jacked-up, disturbing stuff that was way beyond stupid werewolves, Frankenstein's monsters and Draculas. We put a lot of that stuff in there, like Shub Niggurath, the Shambler and Cthon – which was a Cthulhu-type name. We wanted to throw it in there because, really, the palette of the game felt more true to Lovecraft than anything I'd ever seen. I tried to come from Lovecraft and fit it into our design. Like, we'd say, 'What kind of monsters would we want in there? Well, zombies would be cool, but not normal zombies. Let's make them these weird things that pull stuff out of their heads and asses and throw it at you! Make it kinda funny, but also scary.'"

Assisting this atmosphere was the excellent ambient music by Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor, which was a far cry from the bluesy MIDI numbers heard



» The fireball-throwing, Cthulhu-inspired Cthon remains one of the most iconic bosses in the FPS genre.

"CARMACK TRIED TO KEEP A LOW HEADCOUNT, BUT IN DOING SO, WE JEOPARDISED OUR ABILITY TO PROTOTYPE NEW GAME CODE" JOHN ROMERO



» *Quake's* true-3D engine allowed for truly annoying airborne enemies. Great.



» It always takes a few minutes of deep breathing to recover from the trauma of a Fiend pounce.



» Knights are cannon-fodder at safe distances, but at close range, their swords can be deadly.

in *DOOM*. Romero reveals how the cybergoth ended up making *Quake*'s music: "Well, John Carmack and American McGee were big NIN fans. And we had an agent at ICM in Hollywood, and we were using that agent to get some book deals, and he said, 'Hey, I also manage Nine Inch Nails, and they're totally nuts about your game. They play LAN *DOOM* on the tour bus all the time!' So we were like, 'No way, dude! Let's hook up!' So the guys came out to hang with us, and we were like, 'Hey, what do you think about doing some music for us?' And [Trent] was totally into it, because he was totally into *DOOM*."

Of course, there are two reasons why you may not have even heard Reznor's contributions. The first is that you, like many, played the game without the CD. The other? That you, like a huge slab of the *Quake* fanbase, didn't really bother much with the single-player campaign and hopped right into deathmatches and l33t-speak for the very first time.

Romero still adores *Quake*'s online action. "I was massively addicted to it," he laughs. "Because of the emergence of the internet, we knew it was going to be popular. What happened was that these guys from Houston came and showed me this little, very rudimentary program that got you connected to their server in Houston, and then it would connect you to other players through their server, to play *DOOM*. And when I saw that rudimentary technology, I said, 'This is what I'm looking for!'

"The technology was called 'Dwango', and I said, 'I want to make this successful.' So, I redesigned how Dwango worked. I messed with the communication data, rewrote the whole client, re-factored the whole server to make it more efficient. I knew it was going to be huge."

Thanks to that technology, and thanks to id's friendliness towards their fans – "I said, 'We need to open this game up for the modders!'" Romero enthuses – a massive, unprecedented *Quake* community emerged. "*Quake* gave the community the idea of being able to create these groups of players on teams – clans," Romero says. "It created E-Sports, too; it gave rise to that entire industry. It encouraged people to mod, and start getting jobs for modding. Really, it brought a lot of stuff. You know, just this giant community – people were getting married through *Quake*, and all that sort of stuff."

Quake didn't end up being the experimental, avant-garde piece of game design Romero had hoped for, but it still helped the industry advance in unprecedented ways. It's even a bit much to call it unambitious, as few other games have introduced so many new ideas, skillsets, and even sub-industries. *DOOM* ultimately got more airplay for being more immediately recognisable, but it was *Quake* that truly set the tone for things to come. So next time you're playing the latest, phenomenally expensive FPS epic, just remember id's little *DOOM* remix that ended up changing the world as we isolated gamers know it.



» Note to self: defiling evil altars invariably results in monster ambush.



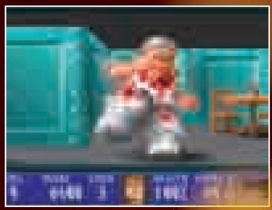
» To finally put to rest all the remarks that id Software can only do brown visuals, here is a lot of yellow.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DOOM
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 1993

COMMANDER KEEN 1: MAROONED ON MARS
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 1990

WOLFENSTEIN 3D
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 1992



LOVE MATCH

Romero has always been *Quake* multiplayer's biggest fan – he met his second wife, Stevie 'Killcreek' Case, through a *Quake* deathmatch. As the chairman of the Cyberathletes Professional League (CPL), he's happy to say there's now a game in development being made exclusively to carry on the *Quake* tradition: *Severity*. "It's 100 per cent based on competition," he says, "versus what other games do, which is try to make the game for a mainstream audience and then add some competition stuff in as an afterthought. But there's no good reason to put that stuff in, really, because it chews up resources and time. *Severity*, though, is being designed exclusively for deathmatch competition."





DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



SNK (PART THREE)

FROM THE HEADY DAYS OF EARLY EIGHTIES GAME DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TO THE TENTATIVE CULTURES OF VIDEOGAMES IN THE MID NINETIES, SNK LEFT A TRAIL THAT WAS BLAZED FROM HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE INNOVATION. MIKE TOOLEY CHARTS THE FINAL CHAPTER OF SHIN NIHON KIKAKU…

The well-publicised demise of SNK shook gaming to the core, coming at the same time that Sega announced it was leaving Dreamcast production. Gamers felt bewildered at the loss and feared that once gaming had fallen into the hands of the behemoths, it would suffer and eventually perish. Corporations that were all muscle and franchise would be all that was left. Gamers cited Sony and Electronic Arts as the villains of the piece, but the truth was gamers only had themselves to blame… themselves and two overambitious Japanese companies.

To fully understand SNK's demise we need to look back to 1996, as decisions made here would shape an unsustainable future for the Osaka firm. In 1996 gaming went through a major change: 3D grew up. Gone were the slow frame rates and poorly constructed visuals of the last generation; at last 3D was living up to its promise. More so it was the form of choice for all genres of games. While early glimpses of Lara and *Super Mario 64* showed games that were just around the corner, Capcom's *Biohazard* was readied for release, 3D driving and fighting games were all the rage in the arcades, and *Quake* and *Duke Nukem 3D* were redefining adventure and shooting games on the PC. 3D, it seemed, could do no wrong. SNK would deliver more quality releases this year than ever before. Despite this, it seemed the audience was not listening, with *Metal Slug* being a good case in point.

Not only did SNK buy *Metal Slug*, Kawasaki was so enamoured with the game that he bought Nazca in order to secure the sequels and to bring Tomohiro and Yokota into the SNK fold. Both would have a significant and telling part to play in SNK's game output over the coming years, most notably the *Metal Slug* and *King Of The Fighters* franchises. The problem with *Metal Slug* wasn't the quality of the game;



it just didn't really work as a financial proposition. It would be three years before SNK would make any profit from the *Metal Slug* series. At the arcade the game was popular. But popular wasn't what it had been a few years ago, so operators made up for low attendances with high pay-to-play premiums on the very latest titles. Gamers wanted an experience what they couldn't have at home, so while somebody would be willing to pay $1 for a credit on *Sega Rally* or *Time Crisis* with their unique cabinets, they were loath to pay half that for a turn on *Metal Slug* in standalone form.

SNK needed to supplement this income through home versions. The AES version (covered last issue) was a sales disaster with demand outstripping supply. Despite this the in-house-developed PlayStation and Saturn releases would achieve moderate but steady success. It wasn't enough, though, from an arcade parent and four subsequent home versions in a two-year period. *Metal Slug* had underperformed *Fatal Fury* by almost half – not in sales, but in profit. Having to deliver games to so many formats to achieve the same sales base as one or two formats would continue to prove costly.

Worse still, AES software sales had all but stopped outside of Japan. Gamers weren't keen to use a complicated ordering system or pay high import prices. Frustrated, gamers turned to systems with regional support. When *Kizuna Encounter* sold a mere 12 copies in Europe and North America and *Super Sidekicks 4* failed to attain double figures, SNK stopped production entirely. A few third- and first-party releases would slip out before the end of 1996 – such as Sunsoft's *Waku Waku 7* and ADK's *Twinkle Star Sprites* – but these would slip into obscurity weeks after release, as gamers just didn't know about them or how to get them. The AES was all but over.

Not for the first time Kawasaki would look to galvanise SNK in the arcades. Responding positively he commissioned the development of the Hyper Neo-Geo 64, bringing to SNK a much needed 3D outlet. Released in 1997 it fell far short of expectation, though. *Samurai Shodown 64* was released as a flagship title but paled in comparison with *Tekken 3* and *Virtua Fighter 3*. It was obvious to gamers that SNK was just cutting its teeth with 3D and that the system was underpowered compared with the Model 3 and System 22 boards of Sega and Namco respectively. The aforementioned looked liked the old masters, while SNK looked a generation behind even in the 3D arena. Arcade revenues were low and a cycle of expensive-to-develop home versions would ensue to try to recoup the costs. Worse, arcade operators were not taking up Neo-Geo 64: despite being cartridge-based like the MVS, each genre of the games required an individually tailored cabinet. Prohibitive costs and low returns for Hyper Neo-Geo 64 hardware and software assured a short life span for the system and, with just seven games released over an 18-month period, Hyper Neo-Geo 64 disappeared entirely.

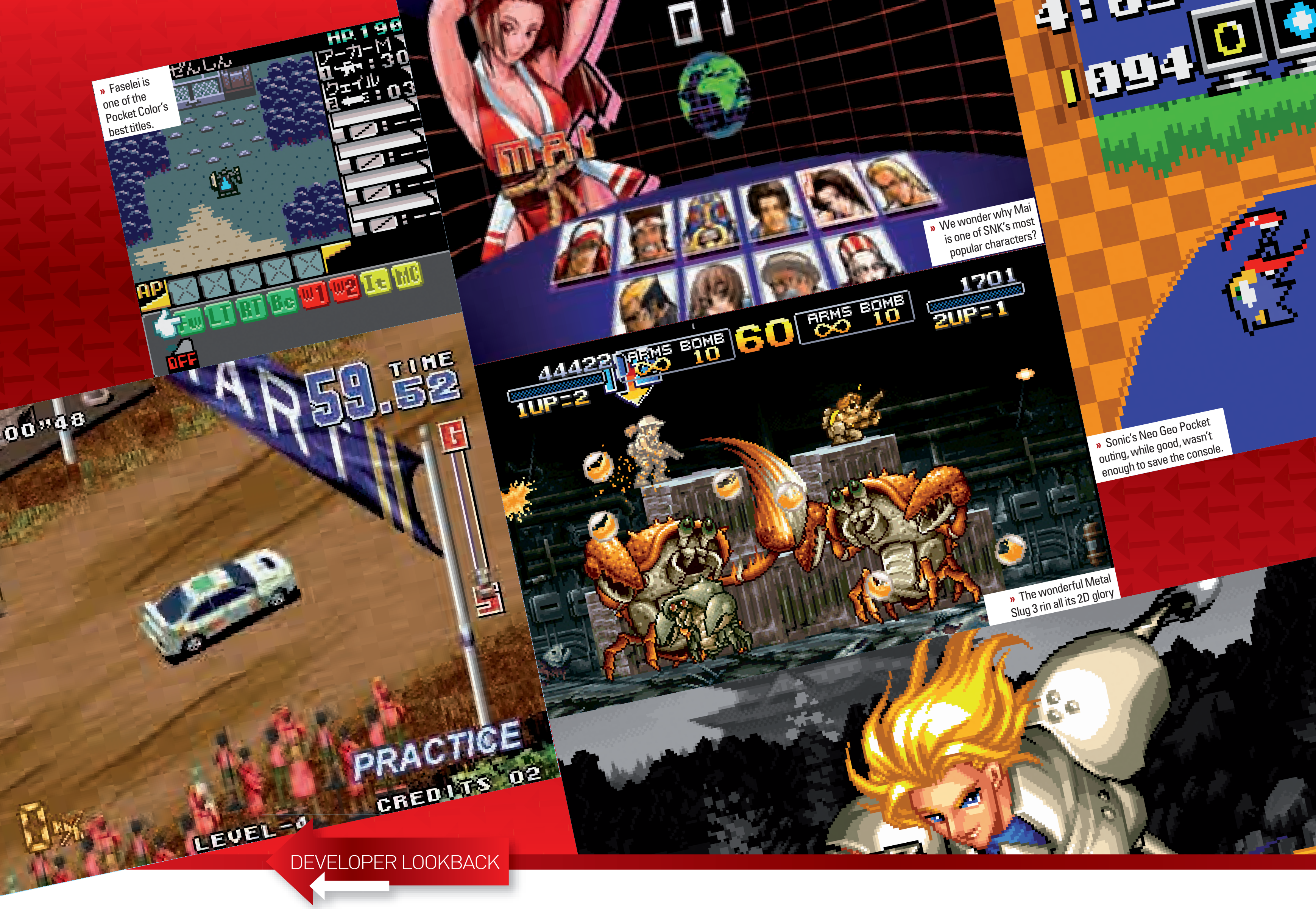
A more successful addition to the SNK inventory in 1997 was the Neo Print machine, a natural progression to the photo booths that had adorned arcades since their inception, providing users with the ability to add colourful frames and backgrounds to their pictures. Many of these machines can still be found the world over in resorts and arcades.

By now Kawasaki had realised that in order to progress SNK it couldn't rely on arcade revenues. Cash-starved through reduced income streams from the arcades and its home consoles, SNK didn't have the funds to gamble on pursuing the 3D dream further than the Hyper Neo-Geo 64. If the home market and arcade market were not going to be receptive to the quality 2D games SNK was producing, he would find a suitable market elsewhere. Kawasaki looked to the ever-buoyant handheld gaming market. This, he decided, would

COURT OUT

SNK thrived throughout the eighties and into the nineties where they funnelled their creative talents from the whole of market into a smaller but more vibrant range of games, somehow through this they managed to avoid much of the litigation that hamstrung the industry through these decades, and went on to register many patents, that would secure Playmore additional income streams when technology would eventually catch up, multi cartridge arcade cabinets are patented to SNK as is the ability to use memory card saves from the home in arcade cabinets to name but two .

Between 1990 and 1994 some of the most high profile court cases would see Nintendo square off against Sony and Capcom, Sega fighting Acclaim while Codemasters and Atari were up for a legal fracas with just about everybody, the list goes on of course but why is this relevant to SNK? Well in 1993 Capcom would sue Data East who at the time were headed by the ever embattled Paul Jacobs, the case centred around Data East's Fighters History, which it was said infringed Capcom's Street Fighter copyright and ip by way of being very similar to play. The game was released in the arcade on MVS hardware and even realised a small AES release. Arriving after Fatal Fury and before The Art Of Fighting, no mention of SNK the direct competitor to Street Fighter and Capcom was made by either the prosecution or the defence. Data East would go on to lose the case that would prove to be yet another nail in their coffin.



» Faselei is one of the Pocket Color's best titles.

» We wonder why Mai is one of SNK's most popular characters?

» Sonic's Neo Geo Pocket outing, while good, wasn't enough to save the console.

» The wonderful Metal Slug 3 rin all its 2D glory



» A Neo-Geo Pocket Color cartridge.







» The Neo-Geo Pocket Color came in a variety of different colours.

be the perfect outlet for SNK games. As he instructed his hardware teams to develop a handheld system to house SNK IP in Japan, he also took the audacious leap of resurrecting SNK America.

John Barone was brought back into the fold to market residual stocks of Hyper Neo-Geo 64 and Neo Print machines to North America, while re-establishing a cost-effective distribution network for gamers still wanting to buy AES carts. Despite there being virtually no market share left, every AES cart sold was almost pure profit; dumped from the MVS version of any new SNK release, the home version would feature only basic packaging. With the title of executive vice president, Barone's first point of business was to install his wife Susan as VP of SNK Consumer Division. Despite the appearance of nepotism, Barone validated this by pointing out that Susan had been the SNK operating officer in the early Nineties. Kawasaki and the Japanese executives looked on bemused but, with an impending hardware release, would consider this situation later.

Nintendo's dominance in the handheld market was and is legendary; Game Boy was synonymous with handheld gaming in the Nineties. Already Nintendo had seen off handheld consoles from the likes of Atari, Sega, Tiger Electronics and NEC, not through superior hardware or games but because it targeted a much younger audience. Kawasaki, as he had with the AES, recognised that there was an older audience out there that was unimpressed with Game Boy and untapped by Nintendo. In September 1998 the Neo-Geo Pocket was readied and released in Japan. The portable games system consisted of a D-pad and two fire buttons, and came packaged in a plastic case. Featuring a monochrome screen, it outperformed the Game Boy in all hardware specs, including having almost three times as much battery life.

Neo-Geo Pocket sold 10,000 units in its first month at retail. And with launch games like *King Of The Fighters R-1*, *Samurai Shodown* and *Neo-Geo Cup 1998* having a huge attachment rate, success for the fledgling handheld seemed assured. With initial launch figures superior to Sega's Game Gear, SNK had launched a new console to an established mature market and succeeded. Or would have done had it not been for Nintendo… Within two months of the Pocket being released, Nintendo announced that it would be replacing the Game Boy with the Game Boy Color. Within two months the Neo-Geo Pocket had been moved from the must-have list to becoming almost obsolete. Game releases slowed and console sales ground almost to a halt.

With a heavy heart, Kawasaki sent the designers back to the drawing board to develop a colour system. In his mind nothing had changed; if it could repeat the success with a product that had a longer shelf life, SNK would be bolstered and perhaps would find the financial stability to take it forward again and retain its independence.

Interestingly, the Neo-Geo Pocket didn't receive a retail release outside of Japan despite SNK America being resurrected, but gamers the world over could order the handheld through the SNK USA website. It was intended that the machine would be marketed as usual with prospective owners purchasing from the website rather than the shops. SNK America did nothing to market the machine and sales showed. Between April and August 1999 just two handhelds were sold through the site. SNK Japan wasn't impressed.

The Japanese board, furious at the lack of sales of Neo-Geo Pocket in North America and Europe (at this time the US arm was responsible for all Western markets), demanded a full US release of its successor, the Neo-Geo Pocket Color. Orchestrated from Japan, the Barones were tasked daily by



» Namco's *Ridge Racer* was a huge hit in the arcades and made SNK's 2D titles look very old.

the Japanese executives unhappy with the decision-making that had seen three system failures outside of Japan in a 12-month period. The Barones' freedom of choice and operational control had been removed.

In June 1999 the Neo-Geo Pocket Color was released in limited numbers to the US, followed in August by a full retail roll-out. Toys 'R' Us, Electronics Boutique and Wal-Mart all took up the new hardware and gave it prominence in their stores. Within two months the Neo-Geo Pocket Color had sold its initial run of 25,000 units. The launch games, *Samurai Shodown 2*, *Fatal Fury First Contact*, *King Of The Fighters R-2*, *Pocket Tennis* and *Metal Slug*, all sold through their initial 10,000 copy runs almost instantly. SNK had the machine, the software and the price point; for once it also had a market. Unfortunately it also had the Barones. Not believing in the system, the Barones had failed to supply further orders for software to Japan. This effectively meant that early adopters of the Neo-Geo Pocket Color in the US couldn't purchase software to use on the system; there just weren't enough games to go around.

The Barones were stripped of all their operational powers just after the launch of the Neo-Geo Pocket Color and subsequently released from their contracts at year's end. In their place, Ben Herman would take charge of SNK US operations. A veteran from Jacobs' days at the top, it was Herman who had managed to get Toy 'R' US and Electronics Boutique to take Neo-Geo Pocket Color seriously, and much of the launch success was of his making.

By Christmas 1999 SNK looked to have turned a corner, with games arriving thick and fast and bolstered by a deal brokered by Herman to bring Sega's *Sonic The Hedgehog* to the Pocket Color. Herman formulated the biggest SNK advertising campaign seen since the 'Bigger Badder Better' days. $4 million was spent on TV adverts that would feature throughout the Christmas shopping season in the US and Europe. MTV and Comedy Central would play host to the majority of these commercials. Targeting specific demographics the world over, the campaign was hugely successful and delivered SNK back to the world stage. Many of the adverts were shown during shows that were reaching their creative and audience peaks, like *South Park*, *Frasier* and *Different World*. Gone was the consumer apathy of the last few years; SNK was fast becoming established in the handheld arena.

While Herman had managed to borrow Sega's mascot, Kawasaki had signed a four-game deal with Capcom. The first two of these games would make the new release list for Christmas 1999, and their exclusivity would boost sales even further over the following few months. *Capcom Vs SNK: Match Of The Millennium*, *SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighter Clash* and *Sonic Adventure Pocket* were all AAA products and at the time were all only available on the Neo-Geo Pocket Color. In the arcades SNK couldn't compete with the 3D powerhouses, and the subsequent conversions of its arcade games performed modestly at best. But in the handheld market it led the hardware field and the software stood head

BLOODY PIRATES!

Piracy has held SNK back more than perhaps any other company. With the most notorious example being *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos*, Made available for download by pirates before its arcade release, SNK would become embroiled in countless legal battles to stop its software being distributed freely. The problem started back in the early nineties and came about from gamers wanting to play games in their arcade form without censure.
Because of the furore that surrounded Midway's *Mortal Kombat* and the anti gaming lobby gaining credence and momentum in the US, SNK Japan censored the US and European release of AES games most notably *Samurai Shodown*. Desperate to get around this a group in Mexico developed a mod chip that would allow MVS cartridges to play on the AES hardware. After SNK Japan decided to supply regional chains, an entire cottage industry would spring up, allowing gamers to bolster their AES collections through pirated and modded cartridges.

GONE WAS THE CONSUMER APATHY OF THE LAST FEW YEARS; SNK WAS FAST BECOMING ESTABLISHED IN THE HANDHELD ARENA



» SNK VS Capcom: Chaos.

» Sengoku 3 was another naff scrolling fighter. A genre SNK never seemed to be able to master.



and shoulders above its rivals, despite the comparatively small user base. So successful was this period that SNK had turned a profit outside of Japan for the first time in five years. But once again it would prove to be a false dawn for the company.

Cash-starved after so many years of falling revenues, SNK was just existing. Gone was the dynamism that hallmarked its history; SNK was in real trouble. The exciting and prosperous Christmas of 1999, where hope shone so brightly, quickly faded as the new millennium took hold. It hadn't been enough to save SNK.

In January 2000 ownership of SNK and all of its companies passed to Aruze, a Pachinko manufacturer. Initially this seemed like a perfect match. SNK needed a capital-rich buyer to move forward, and Aruze certainly matched that criterion. For Aruze, SNK offered very marketable IP for which to develop Pachinko machines. Looking to turn SNK back to profit, Aruze would reduce funding for the SNK development studios. With a lack of funding, releases for home systems suffered delays; without a coherent publishing strategy and little in the way of marketing, SNK was slowing to a stop.

Despite this, Ben Herman attended the E3 show of 2000 with an air of optimism. Neo-Geo Pocket Color had amassed a 2% market share in less than 12 months and on display was possibly the strongest line-up of games that the console had seen. *Faselei!*, *Metal Slug: Second Mission*, *Cotton*, *Evolution*, *Last Blade* and *Dynamite Slugger* were all due for release in the next two months. Furthermore these games were tailored to the English-speaking market and *Falselei!* looked more like a next-generation game, pushing the hardware to its limits. It even featured MP3-standard music, unheard of at that time. Off the back of this particular E3, Toys 'R' Us would ensure that all its stores would now carry demo pods of the Neo-Geo Pocket Color, so convinced was it of its future.

If you looked into SNK at that time, its problems weren't obvious, but for those looking out it was evident that the writing was on the wall.

A mere three weeks after the most successful E3 for SNK since the mid Nineties, Aruze made the following statement to the world press: "In a move to regroup and re-evaluate its worldwide marketing strategy, SNK Entertainment, Inc has decided to cease distribution of Neo-Geo Pocket Color hardware and software in the US and Canada, effective immediately. The company will also stop domestic distribution of all Dreamcast and PlayStation titles."

To enforce how much of a bombshell this was to anybody outside of the Aruze central office at that time, in the US all the games that were mentioned at E3 were sat in a warehouse awaiting packaging. All the materials had been purchased a week prior to the announcement, and the games just needed to be assembled into retail form, but SNK was no longer permitted to complete this operation. Instead the boxes and manuals were sold to a recycling firm while the cartridges were returned to Japan for parts.

Too much for him to bear, Kawasaki left rather than watch the company he had built for a quarter of a century stagnate. With other SNK executives behind him, he formed Brezzasoft.

Without Kawasaki and a board to run SNK, Aruze took the step of shutting down all SNK operations outside of Japan. Revenues ceased and the ensuing tailspin would see Aruze put SNK into bankruptcy within 12 months. Debts and operating losses of over $260 million, along with an impending court case from investors headed by Kawasaki that would charge Aruze of being wilfully negligent and solely responsible for the SNK operating loss, was too much



» Whilst not as good as the Mega Drive version, this bonus round on the Sonic's Neo Geo Pocket Color adventure was still fun.

» The *Super Side Kicks* games were fun arcade footy titles.

» Mai takes the term "bottom's up" far too literally. Silly girl.

for the Pachinko maker to tolerate.

This bankruptcy gave Kawasaki the chance to buy back some of the SNK IP from liquidators. Most notably, *King Of The Fighters* would go to Brezzasoft which would release a couple of *KOF* games on Sammy's Atomiswave board during the fallout, but Apple industries would win the rights to North American MVC distribution, and Apple Photo Systems snapped up the SNK photo booth technology .

In August 2001 Kawasaki set up a new company called Playmore, with which he acquired Brezzasoft and set about reclaiming the SNK IP. Continuing the SNK business plans, Playmore would develop games using SNK IP for arcades and home consoles. Playmore would go on to sue Aruze for copyright breaches and receive damages of $58 million, as well as acquiring the old SNK headquarters in Osaka. Two years after its formation, Playmore changed its name to SNK Playmore; SNK was reborn.

Kawasaki puts these years of turmoil into great perspective for us: "After the SNK bankruptcy, SNK IP was taken over by Playmore Co and many SNK ex-employees joined with Playmore at that time… SNK Playmore can be considered as a continuation of SNK, utilising the technology and know-how that has been cultured by the development on more than 100 games and IPs, and we're continuously developing more titles. On the other hand, we're challenging a new genre of entertainment machines – Pachi Slot – and building this business up into one of the pillars of our enterprise for the future. We're now trying to be a Multi Entertainment Company with games and in the Pachi Slot field." He continues, "We have created some new game systems which have innovated fighting games, but it's true that it's not recognised directly by many end-users. We think we have to release AAA titles in the future. If many gamers play our games with our new game systems, they'll recognise our company name."

THE COMPANY THAT SHOT FOR THE MOON, AND MISSED, LANDED SOFTLY

For SNK Playmore the future is assured, albeit at a slower pace. The company that shot for the moon, and missed, landed softly. Still trying to gain recognition for its brand, SNK perhaps should reflect that unlike others who have contributed so much, it has the distinction of still existing. Taito and Atari amongst many others are now just badges; only a handful of pioneers from the early days still survive and SNK, against all the odds, is one of them.

Anything is possible over the next few years for SNK Playmore. With downloadable content available on all major consoles, it seems SNK will no longer have to build new formats to house its IP, new and old. When asked what's next for the SNK and Capcom alliance, Kawasaki replies with a smile: "*Metal Slug Vs Bionic Commando*? If we could have an opportunity, we would like to consider it.".

Despite the rollercoaster that was SNK, Kawasaki cites only one regret for over a quarter of a century in the industry, and it's not Aruze: "It is regrettable to say that *Metal Slug 6* was the final part of the *Metal Slug* franchise, but we would like to develop a new 3D *Metal Slug* game for new generation of hardware in the near future."

Eikichi Kawasaki and SNK, we salute you both.

DOUBLE TAKE

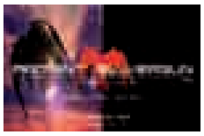
For SNK everything it seems must happen twice. While sales of *KOF 98* were poor on PSX because gamers were waiting on PS2, the Dreamcast in Japan received *KOF 98* and *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* just as Sega's much loved machine went through its final death rolls, contributing to very low sales. After numerous resubmissions to Microsoft, *Metal Slug 3* and various *KOF* titles would eventually arrive on the XBox some two years after their intended launch dates, by this time, Microsoft's big black box was all but dead, with gamers migrating to the 360. Sony have relented and many SNK games are now available on the PSP, but nothing with SNK is ever straightforward, and a similar thing is now happening with its IP on the new download services like Xbox Live Arcade and the Virtual Console. *Fatal Fury* has been readied but remains in testing for Live Arcade, while SNK Playmore are less than happy with Nintendo's current online strategy, despite some 24 Neo Geo games being announced for the console, Nintendo's insistence that only first party software could feature online features during 2007, meant a redesign and another late launch for the recently released *Metal Slug Anthology*, and with a bugged release of *Card Fighters* currently available on the DS, Playmore's future looks to carry forward the non linear tradition of the Oska legend.

Thanks to the lovely Killer List of Videogames for several images.



RADIANT SILVERGUN

A SHOOT-'EM-UP TO TREASURE



- **PUBLISHER:** ESP
- **RELEASED:** 1998
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £100



HISTORY

Thanks to the internet most gamers have now heard of Treasure's sublime *Radiant Silvergun*, but not many have had the pleasure of actually playing it (unless of course you're a staunch defender of the likes of MAME).

First released in Japanese arcades back in 1998, *Radiant* instantly set itself apart from its peers thanks to its superlative aesthetics, constant innovative bosses and an intriguing (if rather messy) combo system that enabled you to power up your weapons by constantly shooting down enemies.

Then, of course, there's the fact that you'd immediately start play with seven very distinct weapons (unlike other shooters of the time, there are no power-ups to collect). Ranging from standard forward fire to a devastating sword that could cut through the metal hull of ships like a hot knife through butter, each armament had to be used to the max in order to make progress through the exceedingly tough stages.

Essentially lengthy boss rushes, a level of *Radiant Silvergun* would leave you bruised, battered, yet exhilarated and desperately eager for more. Despite its insane toughness (you're not going to be one-crediting this baby in a hurry) you'd constantly want to carry on playing, if only so you could see what imaginative boss Treasure had thought up next.

Often huge in size and with over-the-top weaponry to match, each massive boss was a beautiful mechanical monstrosity that would first invoke fear as you gazed upon its immense girth, and then satisfaction as you systematically started destroying key parts of it. Treasure used every trick in the book (and no doubt a few that weren't) to ensure that each and every battle with those memorable bosses stayed in the back of your mind forever, and even today *Silvergun*'s behemoths feel refreshingly new.

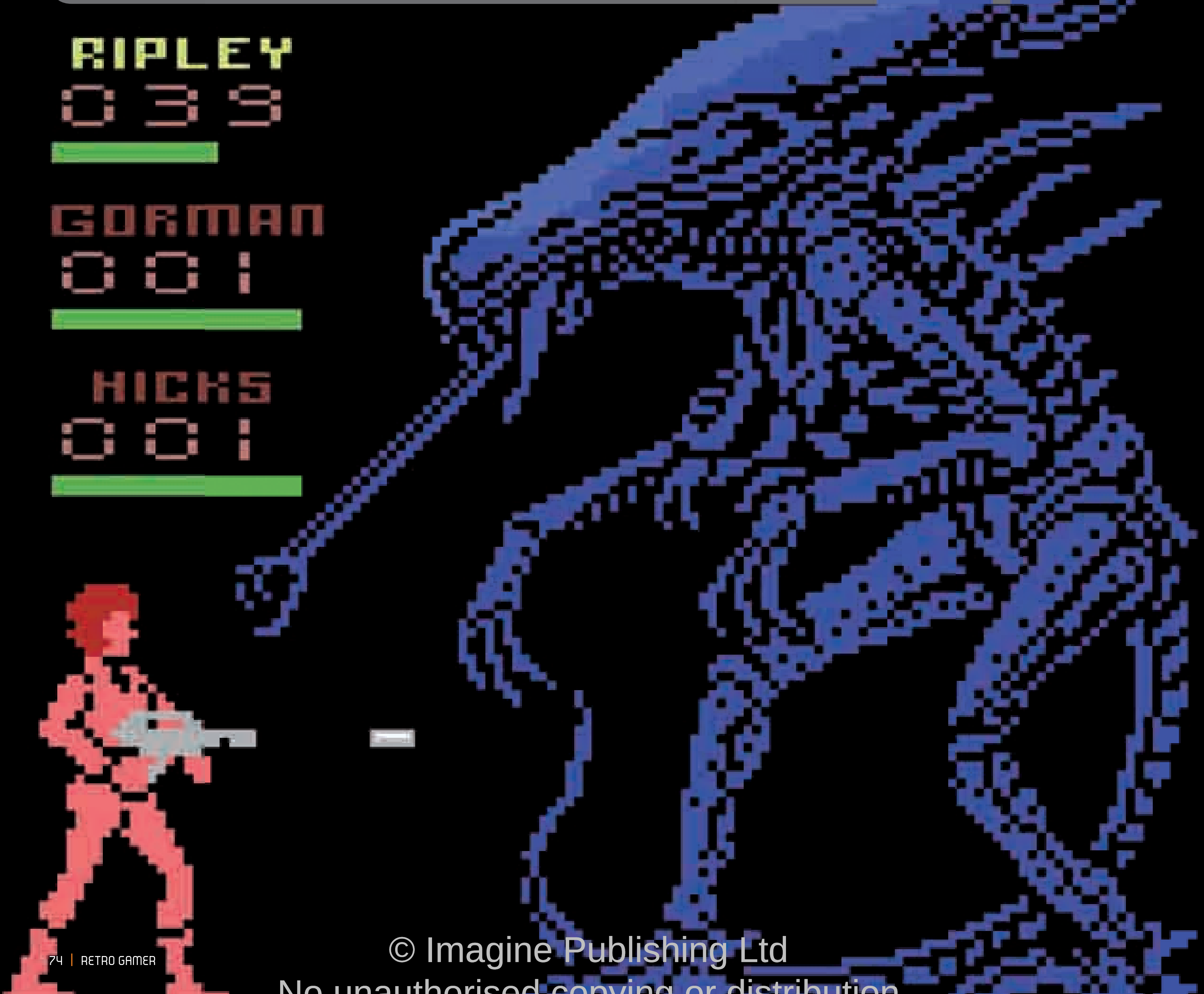
Ported to the Saturn just a few months after its arcade release, *Silvergun* remains one of the machine's best (and priciest) shooters and proved that when it comes to this underappreciated genre, no one quite makes them like Treasure.



THE MAKING OF...

ALIENS

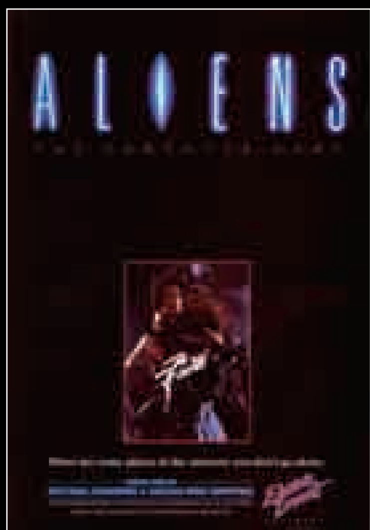
Having failed miserably to bring Back To The Future to life on home computers, no one was expecting great things when Electric Dreams announced that it was working on Aliens: The Computer Game. And yet the result was one of the finest film licences of the Eighties. Martyn Carroll talks to designer Mark Eyles to find out what went right.



"I DIDN'T WANT TO JUST CREATE A CLONE OF EXISTING 2D BLASTERS. I WANTED TO CREATE SOMETHING MORE ORIGINAL THAT CONJURED UP THE SUSPENSE AND FEAR THAT WAS IN THE FILM" MARK EYLES

Back in the 8-bit days there was lots of scary stuff, in the 'ugh' sense of the word at least. In-game graphics were often scary: all blocky and garish. Difficulty levels were scary too, with one-touch instant deaths compounded by a lack of lives. Loading times were also scary thanks to our reliance on standard audio cassettes as the storage medium of choice. And *World Cup Carnival* was definitely scary. However, there were no games – perhaps besides Cosmi's *Forbidden Forest* titles and the odd gothic text adventure – that really cranked up the tension and chilled the blood. There were no truly scary games except for *Aliens*.

Those who braved *Aliens* will surely remember the first time they played the game and felt the fear. Having arrived at the base on LV-426, you selected a member of your six-strong team and boldly ventured forth. You passed through several similar-looking rooms, getting further and further away from your team. No signs of any alien activity. And then your motion detector began to beep, slowly at first, but becoming quicker. You spun around the room, looking for the life form. And then you found it, rushing toward you with its jaws wide open. The beeping became a constant tone and before you could react, the screen blinked out in a shower of static. One man down, but at least now you knew a little about your enemy. It was large, fast and liked to eat your head. Some bug hunt this was turning out to be.



» After the awful *Back To The Future* game, Electric Dreams redeemed itself with *Aliens*, before scraping the barrel again with *Big Trouble In Little China*.

TOGETHER IN ELECTRIC DREAMS

Aliens was released in December 1986, three months after the movie hit UK cinemas. It was published by Electric Dreams, a fairly new software house founded by former Quicksilva managing director Rod Cousens with backing from Activision. Unusually for the time, a full team was put in place to develop the new title. Mark Eyles was tasked with designing the game while Jon Dean was the producer, overseeing the various coders and artists.

"Activision had acquired a number of film licences at the time and Rod asked me to design the *Aliens* game," says Mark, who had worked with Rod previously as Quicksilva's creative director. This was months before the film was finished, so with just the script and the original *Alien* movie for reference, Mark spent two weeks putting a rough design together. Right from the start he was clear about the kind of game he wanted to make: "There are different approaches to making a game from a movie. You can try to retell the movie, scene by scene, or you can extract elements from the movie and create an original player-led story that draws on the characters and scenario. I didn't want to just create a clone of existing 2D blasters – simply slotting in background graphics to suggest scenes from the movie – I wanted to create something more original that conjured up the suspense and fear that was in the film. I chose to focus on a single element that was at the heart of the movie: the combat between the crew and the aliens infiltrating the base. By doing so I was able to restrict the amount of graphics required and concentrate on a single core of gameplay, rather than ending up with a compendium of mini-games all themed round scenes in the movie."

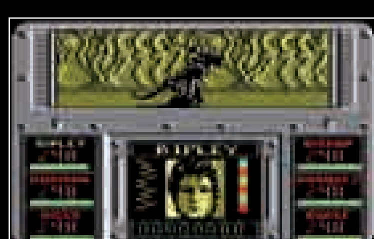
Here Mark is no doubt referring to Activision's own take on the movie, originally released Stateside and later brought to the UK as *Aliens*: *US Version*. Regarding this rather odd publishing decision, Mark says: "I don't think Activision was really aware of what we



» Don't even think about leaving the base. Stepping outside results in instant death due to the moon's poisonous atmosphere.



» Mark Eyles with an alien model which fellow lecturers gave to him on his 50th birthday last November.



» The queen alien, as seen on the Amstrad CPC. Once she's flopping around in a pool of acid blood, you need to head right back to the beginning to complete the mission.

VERSION CONTROL

There is very little to choose between the different versions of *Aliens*, but if we were to throw them all before the Conversion Capers jury we'd probably find in favour of the C64 game. The graphics may be blocky, and nowhere near as detailed as the Spectrum version, and the sound is limited to a few spot effects (unlike the CPC version which features a superbly subtle in-game tune), but the C64 version triumphs thanks to the speed of the game. You can actually run through the base, whereas in the other versions you're forced into a leisurely ramble due the sluggish scrolling speed. Special mention should also be given to the Commodore 16 conversion by Mr Micro which, despite only featuring four controllable characters instead of the usual six, does a mighty fine job of shoehorning the game into a miserably small amount of memory.



» *Aliens* on the C16 is a credit to the computer, and closely resembles the Spectrum version.

IN THE KNOW



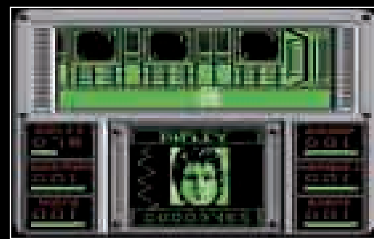
- **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRIC DREAMS
- **DEVELOPER:** ELECTRIC DREAMS
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON/STRATEGY
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1

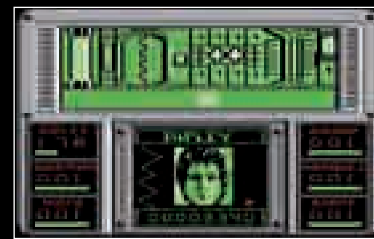
THE MAKING OF…

ALIENS

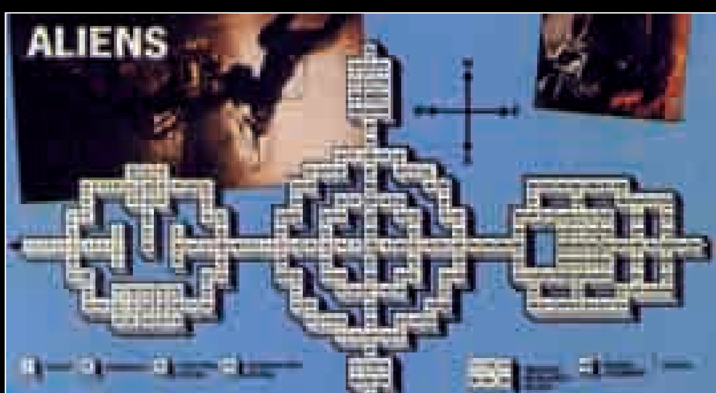


» The display may be monochrome, but the Spectrum version displays some nicely shaded graphics to depict the base and its inhabitants.





» Two of the unique rooms you pass through on your way to the queen's lair: the control room (left) and the research block.



» If you lost the original map, or more likely snagged a copy of the game from a mate, the magazines were always able to help out. This map appeared in Crash issue 40.

were doing. It had the licence and was keen to make as much use out of it as possible and thought that creating both UK and US games would ensure it would earn the maximum amount of money. I would guess that Activision was also hedging its bets as Electric Dreams didn't have a track record, so it probably wanted a backup plan in case our *Aliens* game didn't turn out well."

It's somewhat ironic then that the US game is a multipart affair that, while very faithful to the movie, is routine and tedious – two things the UK game is definitely not. "I saw the US version, but it didn't seem to be doing anything special," says Mark. "I believe there were two key innovations in the UK game. Firstly the use of a scrolling background that wrapped around to give the player the impression that they were standing in a room. This was not a 3D environment, but was trying to simulate one, giving the player a first-person view of the action. It seemed like an obvious game mechanism for immersing the player in the action. You're not sitting at a computer playing this game but you're actually tied into the cameras of the marines who are making their way through the base. A lot of design decisions were about trying to fully immerse the player in the game world. This was a game that said 'you're really there, you're not playing a game'. Some games take the 'this is a game you're playing' attitude and are very up front about the gameplay mechanisms, like on-screen health bars for level bosses. I chose the former as I thought it would better immerse the player.

"Secondly I believe *Aliens* was one of the first team-based combat games. The film was about a team arriving at a base and fighting aliens, not Ripley arriving alone. It was essential to try and reflect this in the game. It would have been significantly less interesting if the player only had Ripley to control. The introduction of more characters gave the player strategic decisions to make. You got to choose the outcome of the battle between the marines and the aliens – you were not forced through a series of pre-scripted hoops. Having a team also increased the tension as characters not currently under control were attacked."

COLONY WARS

Once the initial design was in place it was sent to 20th Century Fox for approval. This proved to be a formality. "I didn't have any problems getting the design passed," Mark tells us. "At the time film studios hadn't really realised the potential of videogames. They were happy to license them and let you get on with it. They did not yet see this as a major part of their business. That came later."

The good fortune continued as the development progressed with very few problems. Mark was fairly removed from the team, although he did continue to work on the design and tweak it as the game was programmed. Besides typically tight deadlines ("I remember the programmers were sleeping in the offices at Electric Dreams and working round the clock"), the biggest challenge was trying to add variety to the colony's 255 rooms. Memory restraints meant that the number of location graphics was limited, and while there were a few unique rooms such as the armoury and the control room, the vast majority of the locations looked identical. This meant it was very easy to get lost in the labyrinthine base,



» The original release came with a game map that was almost indispensable. Trying to navigate the base without it was futile.









» An alien rushes its pray in the game's terrifying attack sequence. As Hudson memorably said in the movie, "We're in some real pretty shit now man!"

"THE FILM WAS ABOUT A TEAM ARRIVING AT A BASE AND FIGHTING ALIENS, NOT RIPLEY ARRIVING ALONE. IT WAS ESSENTIAL TO TRY AND REFLECT THIS IN THE GAME" MARK EYLES


» Mark lecturing his students about the good old days when games were good and the pixel was king.

even with the map that came bundled with the game. "In retrospect the rooms could have been better differentiated," admits Mark. "There was actually a problem with the room wall graphics. They were created as a series of tile strips, designed to fit together in a specific order. When they were put into the game they got scrambled about a bit. There wasn't time to fix this before the game went out, and while it wouldn't have made a big difference, it might have helped if fixed. The reason a map was included was to help players with navigation. There was a trade-off between making the base big enough to give players a game that would last and was sufficiently challenging, and keeping the game easy enough to complete successfully. I guess if we had been given longer to finish the game we could have spent more time balancing the difficulty level."

Aliens was developed simultaneously for the Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC and Spectrum, with ports to the Commodore 16 and MSX appearing later. The game was praised by the computing press – Zzap!, Amstrad Action and Sinclair User awarded it 81%, 90% and 5/5 respectively – and Mark himself had no complaints either. "I was very happy with the finished product. I was particularly pleased with the effect of the motion detector 'beep' when you were in a room with an alien, using sound as a key gameplay mechanism. I thought this served to build up tension very effectively, especially when an alien was right behind you."


» Mark's original design for the game interface shows how the user would be able to view the cameras of all of the marines.


» While the Amstrad version was much prettier than its 8-bit counterparts it was cursed by sluggish speed.

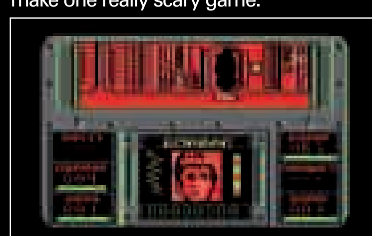
From his original design, only one main feature had to be jettisoned. "Initially I wanted to have views from all the characters' cameras on screen. However, this was far beyond the capabilities of the target platforms and had to be dropped. If the game was remade now this would be a great thing to include."

ALIEN LEGACY

As it would happen, Mark was given the chance to work on a modern *Alien* game when employed by Rebellion as head of design in 1999. "I joined Rebellion just as it was completing its *Alien vs Predator* PC game. I didn't have much input on this, but did do some design work on the Gold Edition that was released later. I think this conjured up the whole *Aliens* atmosphere perfectly. Later I worked on designs for a full *AvP* sequel which was sadly never made as the contract went to Monolith."

Mark worked in the industry until 2003 before escaping to academia. He's now a principle lecturer in games technology at the University of Portsmouth. For him, and his students, the legacy of *Aliens* lives on. "I teach my students about game design and producing design documentation. Part of this is looking at the history of games and also the development of gameplay mechanisms. I use *Aliens* as an example when I talk about game genres and specifically when I talk about shooters, as well as using it as an example of one of the ways that films can be turned into games."

And no doubt *Aliens* is also ideal for showing tomorrow's designers how to make one really scary game.


» Don't kill aliens in front of doors. Their acid is deadly.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

I OF THE MASK
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985

SPINDIZZY
SYSTEMS: C64, CPC, SPECTRUM, ATARI 8-BIT
YEAR: 1986

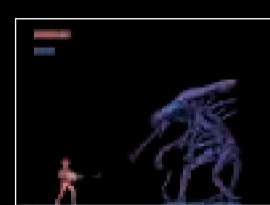
R-TYPE
SYSTEMS: C64, CPC, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1988



ALIENS: JAPAN VERSION

The UK was given two *Aliens* games – Electric Dreams' original and the US version. It was a similar story in Japan; only instead of the US version our friends in the Far East received a Japanese-only *Aliens* game for the MSX in 1987. More intriguing still is that the game was developed by Square and is widely believed to be the role-playing behemoth's first and only platformer. Playing as Ripley (who appears to be either naked or sporting a pink shellsuit), you bounce along the planet surface, Mario-style, shooting face-huggers, adult aliens and, yes, killer snakes. It's completely mad, but the soundtrack by well-known Japanese composer Nobuo Uematsu is excellent, and the end-of-level boss battles against the queen are grandiose in typical Square style. Here's hoping that one day this curiosity will appear on Virtual Console. Until then you can emulate the game now using blueMSX or something similar.

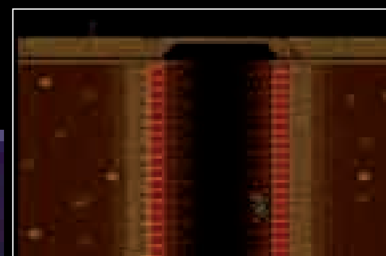




THE CLASSIC GAME

FLOOD

You remember Bullfrog, rightly, for Populous. For Theme Park. For Dungeon Keeper. Syndicate, even. But is Simon Brew the only one with a soft spot for their aquatic platformer (with James Pond, thankfully, nowhere in sight)?

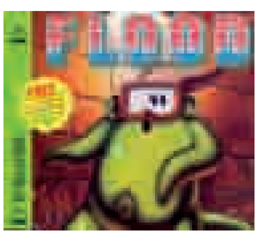


» The road to one of the most sudden, mean endings in 16-bit gaming history.

IN THE KNOW

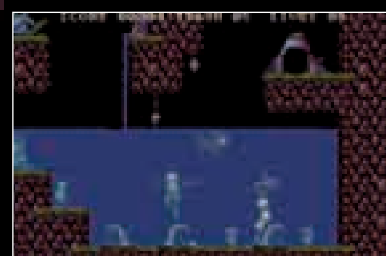


- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** BULLFROG
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10



Depending on your point of view, the ending of *Flood* was either a moment of genuine warped genius, or a sick trick against those who'd battled through the 42 levels of Bullfrog's one and only platformer. And while we won't spoil the finale here, you can chalk this writer into the 'annoyed, but secretly impressed' camp. More 'annoyed' at the time, though, if memory serves.

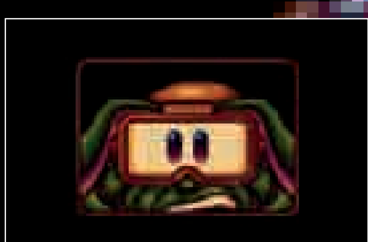
Still, in the platform game genre, *Flood* is a word barely uttered. Among your Sonics and Marios, there's rarely even a nod of the head to Bullfrog's baby. In fact, this isn't just history playing tricks. Even the scores at the time weren't going overboard: 84% from Amiga Format, 80% from Zzap! and a tawdry 76% from Amiga Computing. Truthfully though, those scores are a fair reflection of an at-times fascinating game that fell just short of greatness. There were problems with *Flood* that bordered occasionally on frustration, and certainly it also suffered by comparison with the likes of *The New Zealand Story, Rainbow Islands* and whatever other compatriots Taito threw at it. A couple of levels, in particular, were steadfastly tricky and borderline impossible, and perhaps it was no coincidence that cheat codes aplenty quickly filled the pages of every ST and Amiga magazine going at the time.

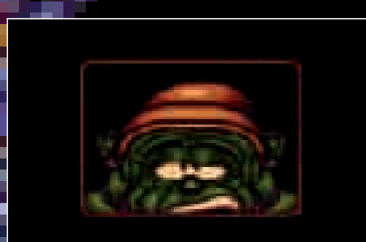


» The trick, as you'd expect, is not to drown.

But I defy you to say that *Flood*'s not worthy of some form of remembrance. Melding together some genuine wit and a degree of experimentation in a genre that too often got stale, what's often forgotten about *Flood* is that the game at the core of it is incredibly good fun. And, at the time, it bothered to be a little bit different.

Legend dictates that creator Sean Cooper – who went on to develop the likes of *007: Everything Or Nothing* and the original *Battlefield* – started working on *Flood* shortly after he'd completed one of his initial Bullfrog assignments (working across the *Populous* and *Powermonger* franchises). At the time, gaming legend



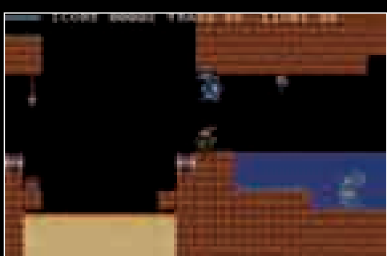




» The infamous mutant teddy bears. Someone was having very sick dreams…

THE GAME AT THE CORE OF FLOOD IS INCREDIBLY GOOD FUN. AND, AT THE TIME, IT BOTHERED TO BE A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENT





» Hmmm. Fire or water. How would you prefer to go?

Peter Molyneux simply asked Cooper what he could do. Within 24 hours what would become *Flood* was being scurried along into production, and it would prove to be Cooper's first self-developed game.

It centred on a character called Quiffy who, unlike his rivals at the time, clearly had no eye on the spin-off merchandise market. Little chance of a movie career here. Quiffy had other problems back then, though, namely that his world was rapidly filling with water, which meant that his mission was to stop it happening. And that was the basis of *Flood*.

Each of its levels was pretty much based around collecting up what you needed to get and heading for the teleport machine that would take you to the next. It wasn't called *Flood* for nothing, though, and the dithering player who took their time through a level would be rewarded by their lungs filling with gallons of water and a life being deducted. A simple mechanic that put far more urgency into proceedings than any standard timer.

Not that the water was the only peril. The world of *Flood* is infested with a bizarre and deeply unpleasant collection of characters (the psychotic teddy bears require little explanation for those who played the game through at the time).

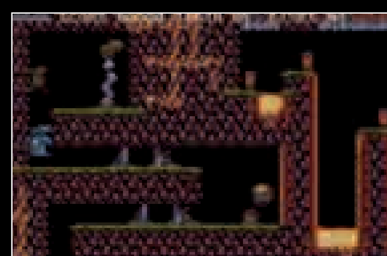
Nothing particularly radical, granted, but the end result was a game that pushed you really quite hard at times. And the vast majority of the time – although not always, which is perhaps what really costs it classic status – it did it fairly.

Still, one of the factors that helped carve *Flood* a niche was the talented nature of its lead character. Sure, in the modern-day platformer you expect your character to be bestowed with an array of interesting, useful and ego-boosting talents. But when Quiffy clung to the ceilings, you wouldn't quite call it a ball-dropping moment, yet it was nonetheless something that mildly shook the genre around a bit. Few could accuse Bullfrog of clinging steadfastly to convention.

Quiffy's arsenal helped, too. None of the polite, borderline pacifist antics of Mario here. Quiffy was a violent little fella, and throughout the game found himself armed with a boomerang, shuriken, flamethrower (my personal favourite, due to the sheer level of damage you could do with it), grenades and dynamite. On top of that, the caverns of *Flood* were liberally littered with other little objects of help and hindrance. There was, and is, if you're inclined to boot it back up, lots to do.

Finally, perhaps most crucially, let's not overlook the sheer twisted nature of it all. This was a game that was happy to have fun with the player, and wasn't incapable of raising a fair few smiles along the way. And then there was that ending.

There are, though, enough factors counting against *Flood* to ensure its place in the gaming hall of fame is never made available. And, let's be brutally honest, even if an opening occurred for a few more Bullfrog games, there's quite



» Clinging to the walls wasn't a big thing in the early Nineties.

a queue in front of this one hunting for a place. But *Flood* is still, for all its problems, a slightly different, entertaining and at times savage platforming experience. And one not without charm and attention. Little touches such as a pint of Guinness earning you an extra life, a space hopper to help you get to the higher points of a level, and a sink plunger too are just part of its charm. How many other games have an inventory like that?

We don't condone the moments where it does actually get a little unfair, but given the gleeful fun you can have with the rest of it, it's certainly deserving of something more than a slow decline into videogaming obscurity. So here it is. But if you do load it up again, make sure you're armed with those aforementioned pesky cheat codes. Bah…



» Er, things aren't going too well here.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

POPULOUS
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 8- AND 16-BIT FORMATS
YEAR: 1989

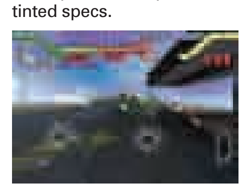
SYNDICATE
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 16-BIT FORMATS
YEAR: 1993

THEME PARK
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 16-BIT FORMATS, SATURN, DOS, PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1994



QUICK RACE

Flood wasn't the first time that Bullfrog dabbled in different genres, and in fact when deadlines were looming with titles it was supposed to be delivering for its then-new parent company Electronic Arts, the team managed to pump out in a matter of eight weeks a new racing game called *Hi-Octane*. It was based on the code that the firm had used to create its *Magic Carpet* titles, and the *raison d'etre* for the game was simply to plug a gap in the balance sheet, ultimately buying the big hitters in the Bullfrog development studios a little more time. *Flood*'s Sean Cooper was one of the key personnel on the game. That said, *Hi-Octane*, unlike *Flood*, wasn't a particularly notable entry into a genre with which the developers weren't particularly familiar. And while it plied its trade across PC, Saturn and PlayStation – and even generated enough interest to warrant an add-on pack – *Hi-Octane* remains an oddity rather than a title worthy of unwisely rose-tinted specs.



» Bullfrog's racing-game-in-two-months-flat, *Hi-Octane*.

COMPANY PROFILE

iD SOFTWARE



ADRIAN CARMACK MODELLING THE FINAL BOSS OF DOOM

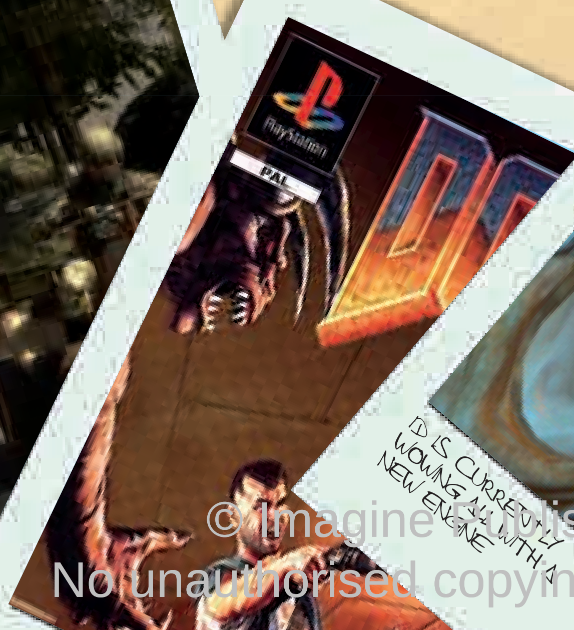


BOBBY PRINCE THE SOUND GUY



VISITING THE KINGS OF THE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER







iD IS CURRENTLY WOWING ALL WITH A NEW ENGINE





Nothing is simple in the world of id. Multiplicity enshrouds almost every milestone that it has achieved throughout the 16 short years of its existence, as Mike Tooley discovers. Even its name is an area of much debate and circumspect idealism, as it comes from Freud's primal face of the human psyche, underpinned by the driven instinct that Freud alludes to in his writings. The original logo, however, was ID and stood for 'Ideas from the Deep'.

» This is where it all began



The id lineage didn't start with the birth of the company; it started at Softdisk, the monthly disk magazine based in Shreveport, Louisiana.

Tom Hall joined Softdisk in 1987 as a games programmer. Natural growth created the need for additional staff and John Romero joined in 1989. John Carmack was working full-time in a pizza bar back in Kansas; coding was just a sideline for him. As a subscriber, he loved the games that Romero had brought to Softdisk and subsequently sent his own work in. Eventually, he too would now make the trek to Shreveport. The two Johns were put to work together, and a synergy emerged between them that would carry over into id. Softdisk didn't allow interaction between teams, but so enamoured was Tom with the two Johns that he would go to their office after hours in order to code with them.

It wouldn't be long before Carmack created a routine that gave the appearance of making the PC scroll (to that point PC gaming was the domain of flick screens). As a joke, Carmack and Hall stayed late at the office one night, where they recreated the first level of *Super Mario 3*. Pixel perfect, the game was left on Romero's desk adorned with the title 'Dangerous Dave In Copyright Infringement'. Smiling, they headed off to get some sleep.

Romero booted the game up and went wild with excitement. Instantly he knew what this meant for gaming. Romero took the game to his section manager Jay Wilbur who championed it, first to his bosses and then to Nintendo. Neither company could see any potential to bringing this style of game to the PC; Mario was to remain a console icon. Unperturbed, the Softdisk trio continued to develop the game themselves, with Tom Hall recalling those halcyon days. "Softdisk didn't want to use the smooth scrolling trick Carmack had discovered, so we thought, 'Well, if they don't want it, we could do something ourselves… Hey, we'll make our own game'. I asked if they cared what topic – sci-fi, fantasy, whatever. I think Carmack mentioned a kid that saves the galaxy or something. I went off and, 15 minutes later, came back with the story for [*Commander*] *Keen*."

It was at this point that John Romero's ego took a knock. Romero took great pride in his fan mail, and had taken to hanging the letters around his workspace. One morning while re-reading the letters he noticed that there was a recurring address; someone, he thought, was having fun at his expense. A strongly worded letter was drafted and sent to the offending address. It would turn out to be Scott Miller's home address; he had used fan mail to circumvent filtering of the Softdisk mailbox. Companies at that time were incredibly nervous of their staff being poached and, as such, didn't allow incoming calls or letters from other companies to reach their target.

Scott Miller had recently founded Apogee Software, a shareware company, and wanted Romero to supply games for Apogee to distribute. Romero sent *Catacombs* to Miller who, suitably impressed with the game, started to distribute it. Romero, Carmack and Hall worked tirelessly around the clock, on borrowed equipment to complete their first opus. Intrigued, Miller paid them a visit. When he saw the Mario clone running he offered to finance the rest of development. The Softdisk trio asked for $2,000 to get the project finished. With only $5,000 in the bank, Miller quickly wrote a cheque for $2,000, such was his belief in their capability.

It would take three months of slaving away, working at Softdisk by day and on their game through the nights. Adrian Carmack (no relation) was brought in to refine the process; at Softdisk his graphical talents had long been admired by both Johns. On 14 December 1990, *Commander Keen* was launched. The first level was free, with gamers being required to buy the later levels. The gaming press and gamers loved it. Four short weeks after *Commander Keen*'s release, the first royalty cheque arrived for $10,000. The two Johns took the owner of Softdisk to lunch to tell him they were leaving, and added that they would be taking Adrian Carmack too. Once they returned to the office they told Adrian

IN THE KNOW

id Software's story begins at Softdisk, a monthly magazine where John Romero and John Carmack worked. The two Johns went on to form id Software with Adrian Carmack and Tom Hall and soon set the gaming world alike with amazing first-person shooters like Wolfenstein 3D, DOOM, Quake, and more recently Quake 4. Its recently announced a brand new game engine.

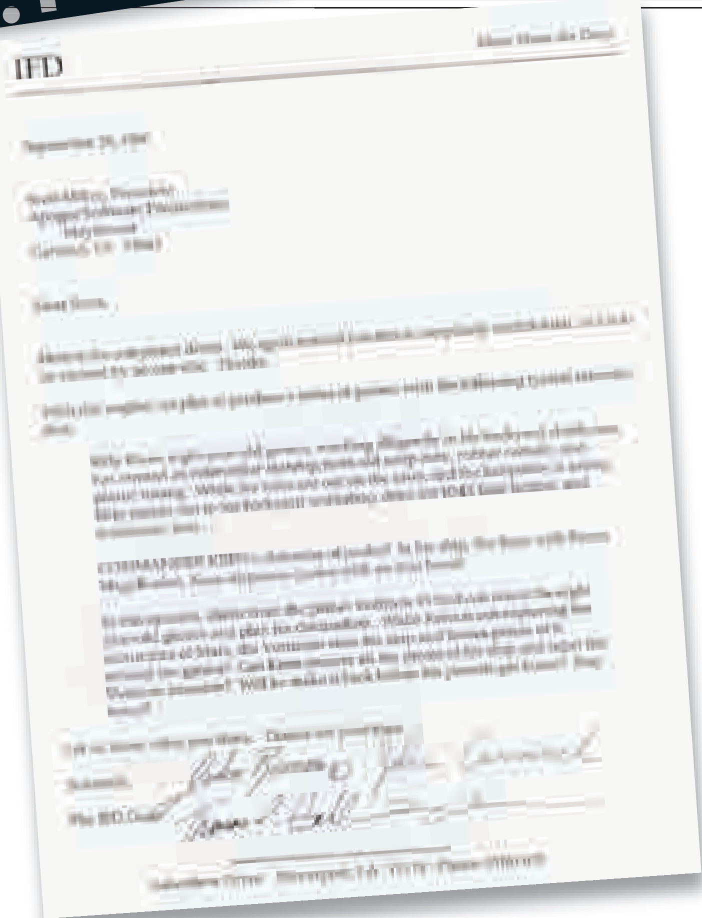


» *Wolfenstein 3D*, id'a first, first-person shooter. More greatness would follow.

JOHN BLOGS

More than any other company, id has always pursued an open door policy. From the very early days it used feedback to tailor its future games. As id blossomed and the internet grew in popularity, the id team would make their email addresses available to the gaming community and answer emails personally. Soon, though, the numbers became too great so Romero and Carmack created very early blogs where gamers could leave feedback and engage the two Johns during downtime. Carmack found this especially useful as he used it as a forum to discuss technologies, sharing tips and secrets while having an army of troubleshooters to help with any possible problems. These blogs took a new twist when the two Johns bought their first Ferraris. Now, as well as charting their game development, they would post speed times taken on the local airstrip. This grew into the whole id team racing, and eventually id would invite other softcos down for speed trials. Check out Planet Romero to see this in living colour.

iD SOFTWARE



» The letter that started it all.



» John Carmack at Quakecon 2006.

CON OF CONS

Quakecon came from gamers and modders joining forces, and evolved from various *Quake* and *DOOM* fan sites. It's hard to pinpoint exactly where it started, but the genesis was E3 in 1997. Before the *Quake* release, id put three free downloadable levels on its website. This provided a public beta and also allowed gamers to practise for the competition that Carmack was organising. Open to all, a series of *Quake* tournaments took place across the US. The winners met for a final at that year's E3, and the champion (Thresh) drove away in Carmack's beloved Ferrari. Professional gaming was born. Since then Quakecon has become an annual event for the community. Check out some of the speed runs at Quakecon.com

that they had handed his resignation in on his behalf. Bemused, he didn't argue and duly followed them out of Softdisk. Now the four would be equal partners and id Software would begin proper on 1 February 1991.

A hangover from the hasty departure from Softdisk was that id would have to release a game through Softdisk every two months to ensure the continuation of the publication. This would remain in place until Softdisk could replace the departed team. "As part of leaving, we agreed to do games so the Gamer's Edge product could continue," explains Hall. "At the time, I really didn't want to do a *Keen* for them, but we needed a ramp-up for the next *Keen* trilogy. I was eventually convinced. We were doing this game and some other game at the same time. It was kinda crazy. But doing all those different types of games (puzzle, shooter, platform, and so on) was incredible training. You'd have to work for a decade on normal-sized games to get that experience. We did it in a year." To id this was a small price to pay for its freedom and it soon advanced the company beyond measure. Romero modestly recounts this period as: "some great times… nothing can come close to my memories of our little tight-knit team working furiously with a single goal in sight and having plenty of talent to achieve that goal in record time. It was the beginning of a new age, for us… and the entire industry."

For the rest of 1991, sequels to *Keen* would ensue, while Carmack perfected his new Ray Casting technology which enabled the creation of 3D worlds. Two Softdisk games would feature this technology as id fulfilled its contractual obligation; and as Carmack refined the engine, *Wolfenstein 3D* took shape. To id it was a sequel to a game by Silas Warner (*Castle Wolfenstein*) that they loved as kids. Development would take longer than expected and so Apogee would create the final games for Softdisk on id's behalf, freeing the team to focus on *Wolfenstein*. The Warner original was a stealth game, but sensing that with a game engine as fast as theirs people would want action, all stealth modes were eventually dropped and replaced by a high-octane killing fest. The first-person shooter had been born. Banned in Germany, and targeted by animal rights protesters, the game brought id more than a few column inches outside of the gaming press. id would now walk hand in hand with notoriety.

Jay Wilbur had recently moved to id from Softdisk and took over many management tasks at the fledgling company. Full of marketing know-how, he milked the press attention for all it was worth. Romero and the team would quickly assemble and release a sequel named *Spear Of Destiny*, while Carmack ported *Wolfenstein* to the SNES. It was during this time that Carmack would learn a 3D trick that would enable the creation of the game engine that would become id's watershed, the *DOOM* engine.

Nobody worked harder than id at that time; the company was all consuming. And as tensions spilled during *DOOM*'s gestation, friendships frayed. Tom Shaw would be id's first casualty. His relations with John Carmack were at a low, and he was reticent to commit even more time to the company. Eventually Carmack and Adrian decided that Shaw should go. Less than happy, it was left to Romero to tell his friend; something he never recovered from.

In early 1993, Sandy Petersen was brought in to replace Tom Shaw. A 37-year-old veteran for Microprose, it didn't take long for him to impress his new bosses with his level design. While Carmack refined the *DOOM* engine,



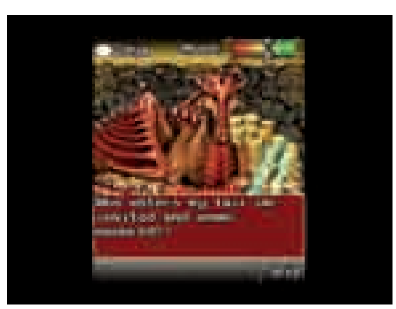
» Tom Hall at Softdisk.

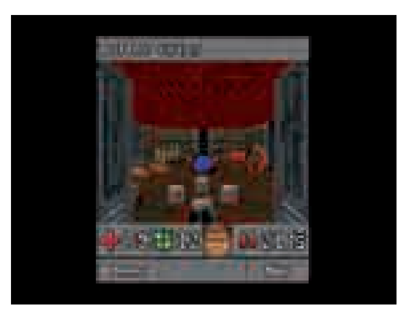
Romero and Petersen would design some of the most fiendish levels gaming had seen, while Adrian created a hellish horrorscape. Sound would be a problem; as all the resource at id was going into game creation, sound tools had been overlooked. *DOOM*'s sound engineer Bob Prince reveals, "With *DOOM*, I was supposed to have some software that would allow me to do plug sound effects and music in, but it never got programmed." Eventually Romero would find a way around this, as Prince explains. "I depended on John Romero to plug the sounds in for me, and I could then see if they fit for timing. If they didn't, I would try to get a mental picture of what was wrong, correct it on my computer, save it on the network, and then John would plug it in for another trial."

By late September 1993, Romero thought that the game was complete. When Carmack reminded him that they had promised the world network play, an impossible crunch time ensued. This was followed by a realisation of what id had actually done, modestly illustrated by Romero, who shouted, "this is going to be the f***ing coolest game that the planet Earth has ever f***ing seen in its entire history!" And at midnight on 10 December 1993, gamers had to agree.

DOOM was a massive seller, shifting over two million units in 18 months, and bringing id $23 million dollars in the US from that initial sales period.

From here id's numbers would swell. The likes of American McGee and Tim Willits joined and set straight to work on the various sequels, each as successful as the last. *DOOM* and id had made videogame history and in the process changed the way games were played forever.





» With *DOOM RPG* and *Orcs & Elves*, id is reaching mobile gamers.



» They worked and played air guitar harder in the early days at id.

LUNCHTIMES WERE SPENT PLAYING FATAL FURY AND DOOM, WHILE THE REST OF THE DAY WAS SPENT ON DESIGN

John Carmack, however, was becoming isolated from the rest of the team. While id rode high on the success of *DOOM*, he could see the flaws in the engine. He had long since started work on a follow-up that would be used in the next id game *Trinity*. *Trinity* soon morphed into *Quake*, and the id team had a field day populating the engine. Mike Abrash was brought in to ensure that the game ran as quickly as technology would allow. Enamoured with *DOOM*, a young Trent Reznor approached id to score *Quake*. With the Nine Inch Nails being constantly on the play list at id, Reznor was an easy fit and id was quick to secure his talents.

Everything was in place. Lunchtimes were spent playing *Fatal Fury* and *DOOM*, while the rest of the day was spent on design. It seemed id had held onto its identity despite its success, so when Carmack told Wired magazine in 1995, "*Quake* will be Bigger Badder and Better than *DOOM* in every way", the gaming world could be forgiven for thinking that all was well within.

It would later come to light that John Carmack thought the other id guys were not working as hard as he was – probably true given his predilection to coding in 20-hour sessions seven days a week. This led him to remove the separate offices and doors from id: it was now a one-room company. As one team, they worked closely together like they did at Softdisk. Romero baulked at this but carried on regardless, feeling for the first time at id the same oppression he'd felt at Softdisk.

Romero and John Carmack had long argued over the merits of design versus technology; Romero being the opulent game designer, and Carmack the stellar professor. And while Romero bathed in the adulation of the *DOOM* faithful and became a gaming legend, Carmack dissected line after line of code looking for ways to improve performance, unable to accept that gamers loved *DOOM* without it being perfect. In short, Carmack loved the journey and Romero the destination.

On 22 June 1996, *Quake* was released. A technological revelation, gamers flocked to it, the press responded well and it went on to set the sales charts alight. Immediately after *Quake*'s release, Todd Hollenshead would join id and focus on creating expansion packs and platform transitions. Carmack would start work on the technology for *Quake II* and began transferring the engine to different machines, while the rest of id focused on the design for a sequel. Romero was directing *Hexen* and *Heretic* at this point, the first time id had used the engine licence model, and with numerous press and community engagements there was scant time for id proper.

Things had come to a head and Romero was forced out of id. John Carmack summarised, "The bottom line came to be that Romero had reached his level of success and wasn't pushing as hard, so we fired him."

Over the next couple of years id would bleed staff, many leaving to join Romero and Hall at Ion Storm. Undeterred, Carmack kept pedalling. Such was the lure of id, Carmack found it easy to replace staff with the best that industry could offer. In 1997 *Quake II* was released. An incredibly diverse single-player game was bolstered by up to 32-player deathmatches. The game cleared a million units in six months, quite a feat considering most people had to upgrade their PC to play it.

Two years would pass and the series was furthered again, *Quake III Arena* would move gaming on again. This time the whole game was deathmatch-based. Still the standard by which all multiplayer games are measured, *Quake III*'s game engine quickly became the most licensed in the world.

Sales were good, but creativity was slow at id from 1999. With Carmack creating a totally new engine it would be too long before a new game was readied. Recently promoted CEO Todd Hollenshead brokered a deal with Nerve Software and Gray Matter Interactive to create a new *Wolfenstein* game. This collective effort resulted in *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, a remake without compare. The story brought a supernatural twist to the Second World War, and quickly became the biggest-selling game of 2001.

Although the next few years seem to be an unproductive period for id, such was the revolution that lay beneath, it would take longer to develop the engine than planned. Internet rumours were rife: Carmack quits, id is over, id split over game format, the list goes on. The internet doomsayers found more fire when Trent Reznor quit as sound engineer and id failed to reach an agreement with Bob Prince to reuse the sounds of the earlier games. Nevertheless in 2004, *DOOM 3* was released. A tribute to the original, the design perplexed gamers. It wasn't a fragfest but the game Carmack had wanted *DOOM* to be first time around: a survival horror. For the first time id had divided its audience.

Since then id has released little bar a couple of mobile releases. Raven was handed the coding rights to *Quake 4* and *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*. In the background there have been failed takeovers, and the firing of Adrian Carmack. John Carmack remains as the only founding member. Despite this, a new engine has just been demoed, and looks once again to take id beyond current technology.

MOD GODS

id arguably pioneered the modding community. John Carmack deliberately made the protection in his games easy to circumvent, and soon after *DOOM*'s release the first mods started to appear. Some impressed id so much that they were used in later *DOOM* games and the modders were hired. id also made the source code for its games freely available.That's why there are so many unofficial versions of id games on formats that didn't receive official releases; *Quake II* on the PSP, for example. Carmack has a magnanimous approach to other coders and even today still helps them to improve the older game engines. Many third parties have released commercial games under licence from id: id supplies the engine and tools, and the third party puts a game world over it.



» *Final Doom* in all its chainsaw-spattered glory. Dare you play it?

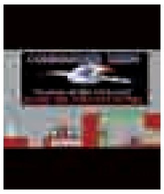




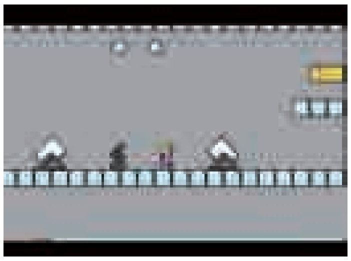
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THE GAMES OF iD SOFTWARE

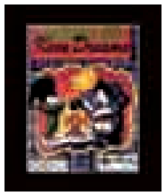
COMMANDER KEEN



» Commander Keen's very first adventure, and the debut of id's ground-breaking side-scrolling technology. Eight-year-old Billy Blaze dons his brother's football helmet and home-made spaceship to become Commander Keen – Defender of the Earth! *Mario* for the PC.



KEEN DREAMS



» Trapped in a land where giant vegetables rule the day, you must fight your way through an army of vicious broccoli beasts, savage asparagus warriors and a bushel of other leafy green nasties before battling the fiercest spud of all, King Boobus Tuber.



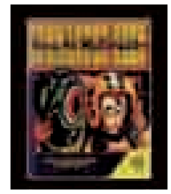
COMMANDER KEEN GOODBYE GALAXY



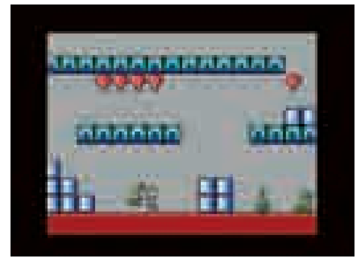
» You are eight-year-old Billy Blaze, boy genius to your neighbourhood, Commander Keen to the rest of the universe. It's time to grab your trusty pogo stick and neural stunner, climb into the cockpit of your home-made Megarocket and blast off for the Shadowlands.



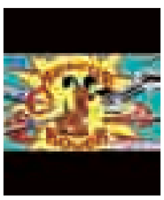
COMMANDER KEEN: ALIENS ATE MY BABYSITTER



» A mean bunch of hungry aliens have your babysitter and they're planning to make her their main course. Now it's up to you, Commander Keen. Save her or risk explaining what happened to your parents. Can you complete your mission before dinnertime?



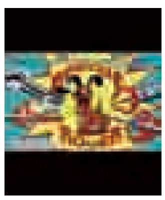
RESCUE ROVER



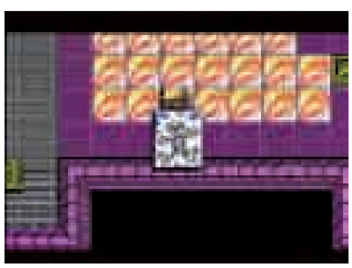
» Your dog and best friend, Rover, is snatched by evil robots. You must journey through 30 mind-bending, deadly robot rooms and rescue him. Each room is patrolled by various types of robots, that you have to avoid, trap or destroy. You have to move items around to clear a path to Rover and lead him back to the exit.



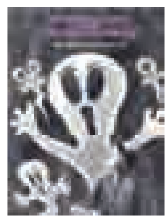
RESCUE ROVER 2



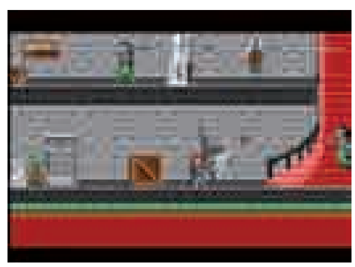
» Your faithful dog, Rover, has once again been dognapped by the evil robots. They're back and they mean business. Hopefully, you're much smarter than they are. The puzzle action gameplay is similar to the original, but set in all new, extra challenging robot rooms with new types of traps to avoid.



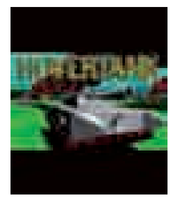
DANGEROUS DAVE IN THE HAUNTED MANSION



» You're a one-of-a-kind dangerous guy named Dave. You're quite deft with the shotgun, and afraid of nothing. As you hunt for your lost little brother, Delbert, you must enter a house full of zombies, spooks and bad guys.



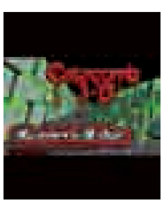
HOVERTANK 3D



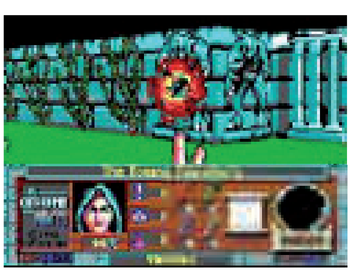
» The first 3D PC game ever! You've been hired by an unknown organisation to rescue people from cities targeted for limited nuclear strikes. With an energy cannon as your main weapon, you must race against the clock, blasting away at nuclear mutants and armoured patrols.



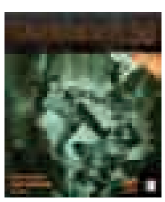
CATACOMBS 3D



» This game takes the technology in *Hovertank 3D* one step further, immersing you deep into a fantasy 3D world. You, the high wizard of Thoria, must save the troublesome but useful Nemesis of Kelquest from his suspended animation in magical amber.



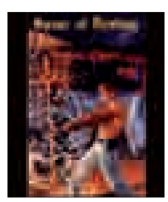
WOLFENSTEIN 3D



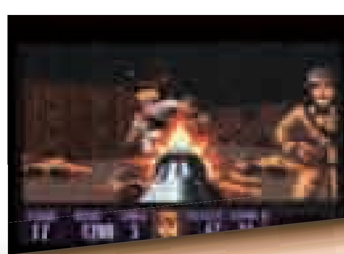
» Maybe it was the fact that people got to blow away Nazis. Maybe it was the sheer challenge of it all. For whatever reason, *Wolfenstein 3D* pioneered the first-person shooter genre and brought its legendary creators, id Software, worldwide notoriety and numerous awards.



SPEAR OF DESTINY



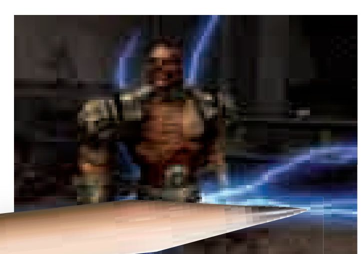
» Hitler believes himself to be invincible with the power of the Spear. Your mission is to infiltrate the heavily guarded Castle Wolfenstein and recapture the Spear from him. The loss of his most coveted weapon could push him over the edge. It could also get you ripped to pieces.



RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN



» Taking on the Nazis and Himmler at the height of World War II, this game showed id at its absolute zenith. History and the supernatural comes alive while delivering the highest body count since *DOOM*. An absolute masterpiece.





DOOM

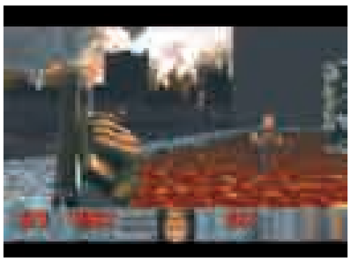
» A monster hit in its day, this is where id proved it wasn't a one-trick pony. Welcome to hell. Sprint through the labyrinthine levels, firing faster than the oncoming hordes, and try to survive. Twitch gameplay at its very best.





DOOM II

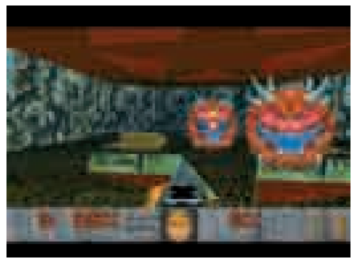
» The hellish hordes have followed you back to earth and the ante is raised tenfold. This time the levels are more challenging, the monsters stronger and the weapons quicker – with the addition of a double-barrelled shotgun. *DOOM* with an IQ.

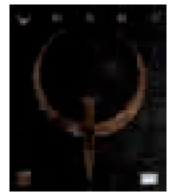




ULTIMATE DOOM

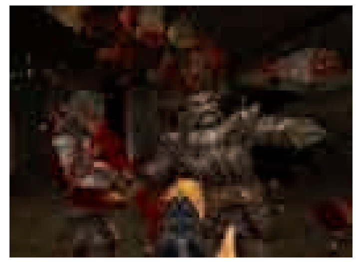
» A remix of the original DOOM with an extra episode to really challenge you with nine expert levels. This is beyond tough in places and can frazzle your brain as you try to think while knee-deep in carnage. Proper gamers only need apply.





QUAKE

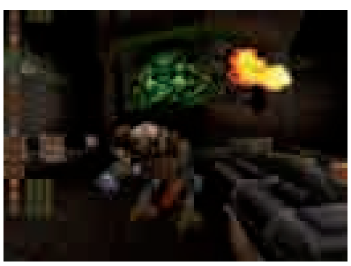
» The game that changed an industry, selling as strongly today as at launch. Everybody should play through this at least once. High-octane gaming in a devilishly gothic setting and a thunderous soundtrack from Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor. Play it now.





QUAKE II

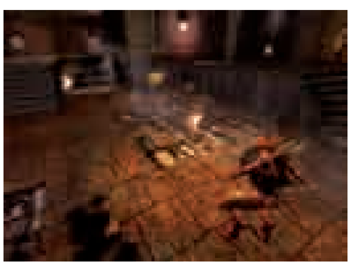
» The thinking man's FPS. Carmack took the genre a stage further, and the improved monster characterisation of the Strogg are still with us today. A mixed reception saw many gamers overlook the offline mode while others sold their grandmothers to update their computers. Very good.





QUAKE 3 ARENA

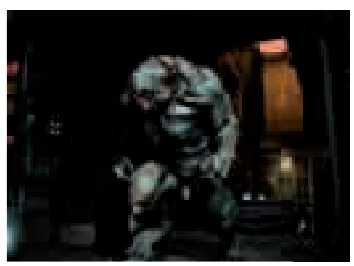
» As good as gaming is ever likely to get in terms of competition, community and entertainment. Still regarded as a benchmark even today, this truly is videogaming as sport, where hard work shows on the score boards. An absolute classic.





DOOM 3

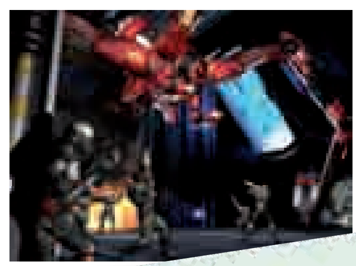
» Carmack takes id into survival horror territory. With incredible graphics, and a co-op mode that allows two players to be terrified together, *DOOM 3* will scare you. Remember the first time you saw the dog jump through the window in *Resident Evil*? Think that every five minutes. Unhinging.

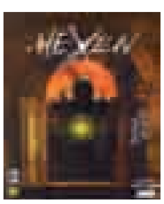




QUAKE 4

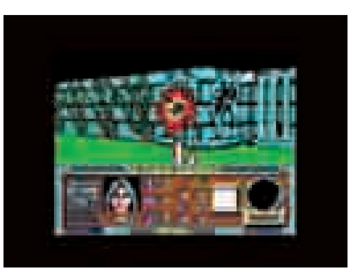
» *Quake* done to the max. Developed by Raven Software using the DOOM 3 engine. A very solid if very straight shooter, there is nothing wrong with it. However, it just lacks the verve of earlier titles, and has a disappointing array of multiplayer maps. Update soon please, id.

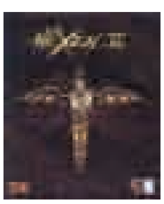




HEXEN

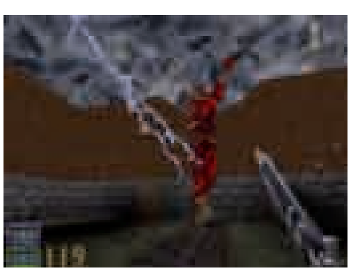
» *Quake* finds its way into a Dungeons & Dragons environment, packed with dragon riders and inspired monsters. The addition of magic and flying raised the bar. Unfortunately it was let down by some less than inspired level design.

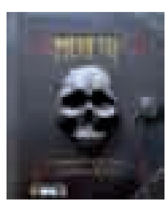




HEXEN 2

» Think *World Of Warcraft* with high-powered weapons, Necromancers and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – all have a part to play as you journey through four demon-infested worlds. The most epic of all id's games and deserving of anyone's time, why did this get missed?





HERETIC

» *DOOM* without the shotgun, level design and music. This is what *DOOM* would have been if id had got it wrong. Worth a look, the game isn't a total loss; it just pales when put next to id's other great games.



HE'S JOHN CARMACK THE LAST SURVIVING MEMBER



Excerpts courtesy of Masters of Doom, Planet Romero and 3D Realms

HIGH SCORE

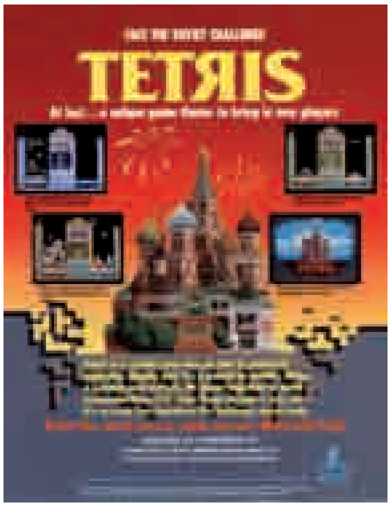
TETRIS

TORMENTED BY A RELENTLESS DOWNPOUR OF TETROMINOES? LET TETRIS OBSESSIVE JAMES CLEWETT EXPLAIN HOW SORTING AND STACKING CAN BECOME SECOND NATURE.

We know prolonged videogame playing can cause repetitive stress injuries to your fingers. *Tetris* can do it to your brain. 'The Tetris Effect' is a recognised psychological phenomenon in which the sufferer is involuntarily prompted to work out how different shapes in the real world might fit together. It's a term that can be used to describe any activity that comes to dominate one's thoughts, mental images and even dreams. Not bad for a 20-year-old puzzle game that can be squeezed into 1K of code.

Created in 1985 by Alexey Pajitnov – his initials, along with other collaborators, appear as block patterns in some of the arcade levels – the version that truly conquered the world appeared on the small screen of the Game Boy four years later. *Tetris* also graced the largest playfield ever constructed when, in 2000, some clever bods at Brown University rigged up lights in the windows of the Science Library so they could play a giant version of the game on the side of the 14-storey building.

For more on this seminal game, we recommend the relevant chapters of David Sheff's excellent book on the history of Nintendo, *Game Over*. You'll discover a tale as twisted and tense as *Tetris* itself.



» The arcade flyer describes *Tetris* as 'positively addicting', which sounds quite healthy.

THE EXPERT

"I know I'm driven by a fear of failure in my life," admits *Tetris* maestro James Clewett, "and the thing with *Tetris* is, you have to fail eventually. There's no conclusion to it and that's frustrating but it's part of what makes it so addictive."

It's a paradox that helps to explain James's love-hate relationship with the ultimate puzzle game. It began in 1993 as an undergraduate in Sheffield, through playing an exceptionally fast *Tetris* clone and posting astronomical scores on the university's intranet. It reached its peak in 2003 when, locked away in a remote Scottish cottage, he achieved scores in excess of 3 million on the arcade version (almost double the world record) to the inspirational strains of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Aware he could never beat the machine, he sought some sort of closure by pitting himself against current champ Steve Krogman and travelled to Las Vegas to compete for the crown. Both players suffered from horrific nerves and though James triumphed on the day with a score of over 1.5m, it fell just short of Steve's official WR of 1,648,905.

"I felt I'd made my point," says James. "My relationship with *Tetris* is a lot more balanced now. A game every couple of days, not every couple of minutes."

His addiction had indeed become that all-consuming. He tells of six-hour stints where he was physically incapable of stopping until he had achieved the monumentally difficult task of getting 50 four-line 'Tetrises' in a row. "I had a date with this lovely girl once," sighs James. "She kept telling me we had to go or we'd miss the film but I couldn't bring myself to leave the game. I was utterly hooked at that stage. And no, there was no second date."

Yet this fixation with falling blocks goes deeper. James has Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. "I wash obsessively, check my house locks obsessively, got married to my work at an early age, which means



» When Andy met Alexey: the giant *Tetris* at Brown University.

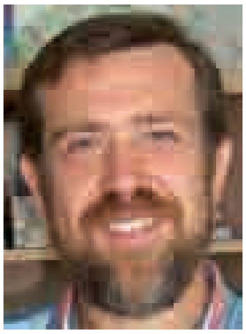
I've struggled socially. I don't play any other game because I know I'll become obsessive about that too. There was a time when I was extremely uncomfortable about it, but now I accept that's what I am. I'm known as Obsessive James and I wear it as a badge of honour. Most of what I've achieved in my life is due to some sort of obsession. I've tried to channel all this energy and effort into something useful through my studies at Nottingham University and I hope to make a valuable contribution to physics."

As James outlines the workings of the secondary motor cortex (see 'Mind Games' boxout) whilst simultaneously clocking over half a million on arcade *Tetris*, you get an insight into how he's managed to turn a condition that many find disabling into something positive. "It's the self-knowledge of my OCD that lets me get through this and I feel enormous sympathy for people that suffer similarly and don't understand. That's awful. You're afraid to try anything, even leaving the house."

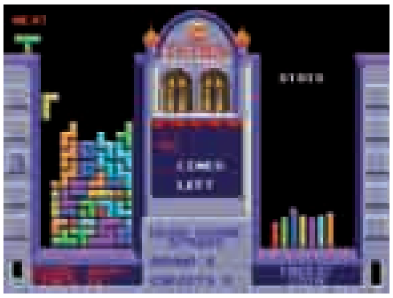
James makes one poor move and such is the speed of play at this dizzyingly high level, a

HIGH SCORE NEWS

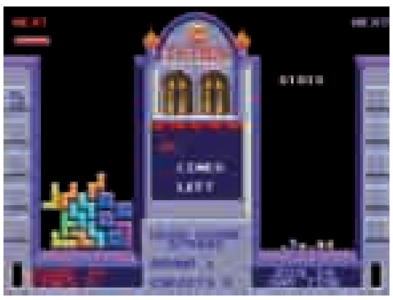
Tales from the 9th Annual Classic Games Tournament held at the famous FunSpot arcade in New Hampshire, USA, fill this month's news section. Brian 'The Dove' Kuh broke an incredible 17 record scores in a single day (as if last year's haul of 16 wasn't enough). Walter 'The Ref' Day officially launched the second edition of Twin Galaxies monster tome of Arcade World Records (page 61 is especially impressive). 20 'new' games joined FunSpot's already superlative collection of original cabs, including two beauties from Owen Rubin's back catalogue, *Major Havoc* and *Triple Hunt*, confirming the arcade as the holiday destination of choice for discerning retroheads everywhere. To cap it all, Ralph 'The Daddy' Baer, videogaming pioneer and bona fide living legend, was in attendance. Start saving your cash and brownie points for the 10th Anniversary event in June 2008.



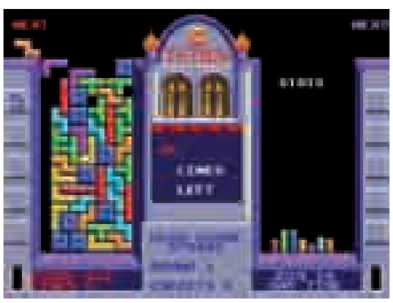
» Alexey Pajitnov, the man to blame for those recurring dreams…



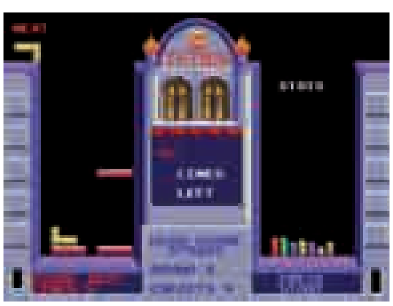
» **1.** The 'lip' (see 'The Knowledge').



» **2.** Always be playing the next piece.



» **3.** Don't panic!



» **4.** Flat is good.

few seconds later it's game over. He fights the urge to immediately hit restart. "I know I'm still horrendously addicted. Maybe if I beat the world record, that will be closure." You'll read it here first, folks.

THE KNOWLEDGE

In the meantime, James is happy to reveal his *Tetris* top tips… "It's surprisingly difficult for me to write this, because so much of how I play *Tetris* has become instinctive. To someone playing at a high level, the best advice I can give is to relax. Better yet, get something to distract you like a good piece of music or an interesting conversation and just let the arcade game playing part of your brain get on with it.

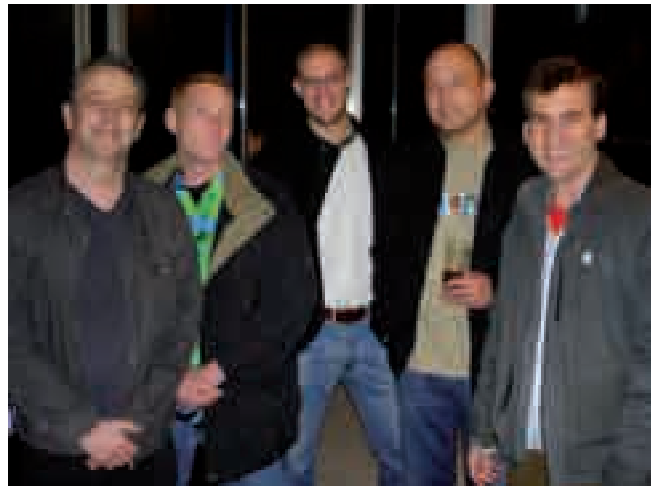
"For the beginner, the most important thing is to be decisive. Once you've moved a piece into position, stick with that, even if you then see a better choice. Under the time pressure of moving the piece into a second space it's much more likely you'll make an error. I live by this rule.

"In screen 1, I've left a two-column-wide gap at the side, with a 'lip'. All pieces will fit into this gap, so if the computer is being stubborn with the piece I am waiting for, I'm still not in trouble.

"Screen 2 shows the same lip, but this time, to keep it available for the next piece, I have put the current piece in a counter-intuitive position. Note then that the next piece will form a Tetris, and I've completed the level. Don't be afraid to experiment with the ways the pieces will fit together. I still surprise myself with new formations occasionally.

"The message from screen 3 is don't panic! Check the piece preview here, as the next piece fits and clears the line. Indeed I went on to clear this level in the next four moves.

"In screen 4 I've laid all the red blocks flat. Don't be afraid of doing that. I like to keep the profile of the blocks as flat as possible, as this leaves space for any other piece so I've not limited my options. Never trust the machine to give you the piece you're waiting for. That's a sure-fire way to end up at the top of the screen wondering where it all went so wrong.



» James (centre) at the High Score UK film premiere, with (l-r) Gary 'Galaxian' Whelan, Bill 'Marathon' Carlton, Tony 'Untouchable' Temple and Jeremy 'Doc' Mack.

"If you're looking to make the big scores quickly, try to maximise your score for each level. For level 1 you need 5 lines, so score 4 and 4; for level 2 you need 10 lines, so score 4, 4, 1, 4; for level 3 you need 12 lines, so score 4, 4, 3, 4 and so on.

"Clearly it's more important to survive the level to play the next one, so don't be ashamed of taking the all-important single line if things are getting tense.

"Arcade *Tetris* is sneaky. It throws in fast levels with slower ones. The music chops and changes speed and it doesn't always link with the speed of the pieces, which is quite deliberate. The designers are trying to distract you. The whole game is a psychological puzzle.

"Finally, if you're planning on having a go at the world record, go for a wee first, as there really are no rest breaks in *Tetris*. And don't get too obsessed, folks!"



» James and his femme fatale…

MIND GAMES



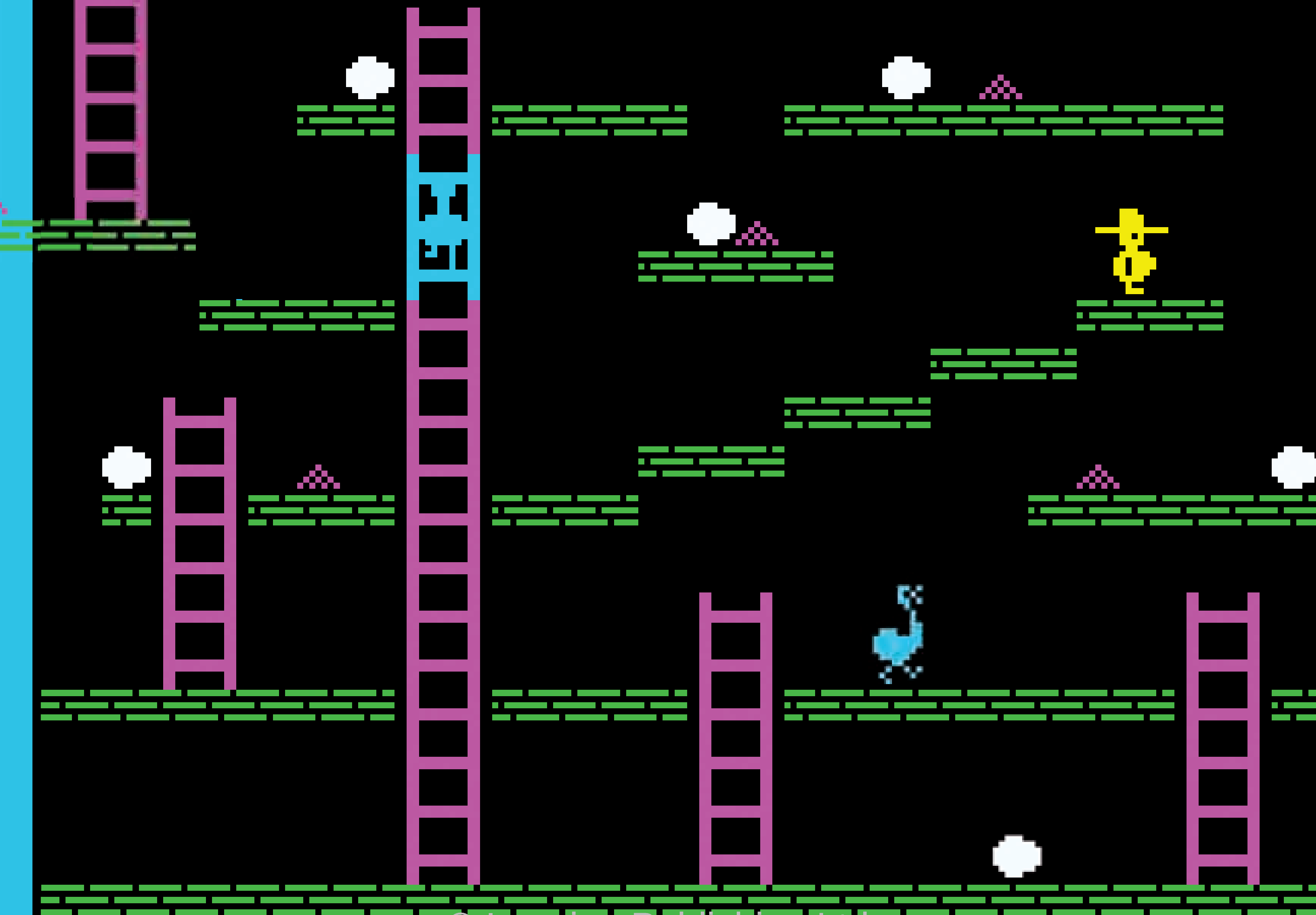
» Let your cortex kick in…

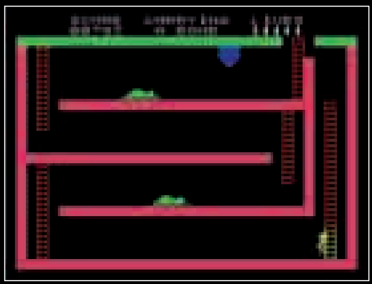
"I think everyone who's got involved with this wretched thing has had those *Tetris* dreams, but they go away when you've played it so much you stop thinking about what you're doing," explains James rather enigmatically. "An element of muscle memory kicks in. The secondary motor cortex is an area of the brain devoted to learned processes. Everyone's had that experience of knocking over a glass and intuitively reaching for it. So, say with David Beckham, he spends everyday taking free-kicks and now his motor cortex takes them – he doesn't. The less he thinks about it, the better he will be because the more he takes his conscious mind out of the process, the more the learned process comes in. It's why I can talk to you and play. In fact, it actually helps."

THE MAKING OF...

CHUCKIE EGG

What do Donkey Kong and Space Panic have in common? Answer: they went on to inspire Nigel Alderton to create an all-time classic on the humble Spectrum, which would be ported to every computer format of the time. Kim Wild finds out how this eggstraordinary title came to life.





» The sequel *Chuckie Egg 2* wasn't bad but never lived up to the original outing.



» The C64 conversion included six difficulty levels, a new addition to the original game.



» The Amstrad CPC version has a devoted following, being quite close to the BBC Micro game.

Every system has a killer app or a series of titles that makes it stand out, even if said games appear elsewhere. Game Boy had *Tetris*, NES had *Mario*, Master System had *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* and the Mega Drive kicked off an obsession with all things hedgehog related. The Spectrum isn't any different and if you ask any owner what games stand out, you can guarantee that alongside *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*, *Chuckie Egg* will get a mention, while many others will cite the BBC Micro version as one of that format's major stars. For teenager Nigel Alderton, the Spectrum would become a pathway to a new world of game creation. "My first computer was a bog-standard ZX81 with 1K of RAM. My parents soon got fed up with me using it on the family TV so they got me a portable black-and-white telly for my bedroom. I loved [the Spectrum]. For a programmer it was such a simple piece of kit to use because you could bypass the operating system and control the hardware directly. Its weaknesses were the blocky character-based colour and lack of a sound processor or reliable storage media."

It would be during Nigel Alderton's mid teens that the talented programmer would get to put his newfound skills to use. "I think I was about 15 when I got a Saturday job in [the A+F] shop serving customers, duplicating tapes, fetching bacon butties for the programmers and management and just helping out in general. I got £7 for the day, which wasn't bad at the time. I'd been working there for a few months when I told them that I was writing a game myself and asked them if they would look at it. All the programmers there had games published themselves and I was just the kid who made the tea, so they were mildly amused by my request. But one weekend I showed one of the programmers my unfinished 'Eggy Kong' game and I still remember the pride I felt when I saw his reaction. Suddenly he was talking to me on a level – asking questions and taking an interest. I never thought of offering it to anyone other than A+F."

A+ F Software was founded by Doug Anderson and Mike Fitzgerald in 1981 who began publishing titles for the Acorn Atom and BBC Micro and were responsible for games such as *Polecat* and *Early Warning*. However, it would be Nigel Alderton's 'Eggy Kong' (renamed by A+F Software as *Chuckie Egg*) that would launch the company into the spotlight and make its fortunes. Nigel's original title of 'Eggy Kong' highlights the influence of a certain gorilla created by Shigeru Miyamoto. "It was inspired by arcade games that I was addicted to at the time. The newsagent on the way to school had classic games like *Donkey Kong* and *Scramble*. At one point it had a lesser-known game called *Space Panic*. *Chuckie Egg* is a cross between *Space Panic* and *Donkey Kong*. Almost every weekday for a couple of years I put a good part of my dinner money into those machines," recalls Nigel Alderton. His love for *Space Panic* meant that *Chuckie Egg* was effectively an unofficial follow-up. "I designed a game which I thought I would enjoy playing myself. I wasn't a big fan of *Manic Miner*-style puzzles so I made *Chuckie Egg* more about dexterity than problem solving – more fast-and-furious than thoughtful. At the time my favourite game was *Space Panic*, so *Chuckie Egg* is really *Space Panic 2*. It's a bit embarrassing now looking back at screenshots of *Space Panic* and *Chuckie Egg* together – and how similar they look!"

"AT THE TIME MY FAVOURITE GAME WAS SPACE PANIC, SO CHUCKIE EGG IS REALLY SPACE PANIC 2"

NIGEL ALDERTON

It has been stated in the past that only the first level of *Chuckie Egg* had been completed when shown to A+F Software but Nigel Alderton is keen to set the record straight. "Actually I'd coded five out of the eight screen layouts before I took it to A+F, but they only saw the first level that day because the code to collect eggs and move to the next level wasn't working. The game was still in monochrome at that stage too – the colour overlaying was added later – but the majority of the game coding was complete and most of the memory was already either used or allocated for animation."

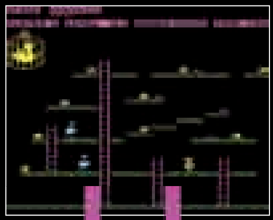
While Nigel Alderton continued to program his Spectrum game, Doug Anderson would work on the BBC Micro version alongside it and although the two titles are mainly identical, there are a few subtle nuances. Aside from the colour variations, the speeds of the character



» The Acorn Electron had a particular affinity with pink and really big birds.

CHUCKIE'S REVENGE

One of the better-known remakes has been a PC version cloned on the BBC Micro release. Mike Elson spoke to us regarding the remake. "The most essential tool was a commercial BBC emulator called pcBBC which I used to play the original to take screenshots to get the look right. To work out the jump patterns I ran the emulator in 'slow-motion' mode and took a screenshot after each re-draw… many of the moves that were possible in the original are recreated faithfully, but there were always things like bouncing off platforms, which I never got right. I got the samples by playing *Chuckie* on a real BBC with wires running from its internal speaker to the sound card of a PC, and recording sections of gameplay to edit down into raw sounds." To download the game, visit this website: http://vroomfondel.net/chuckie

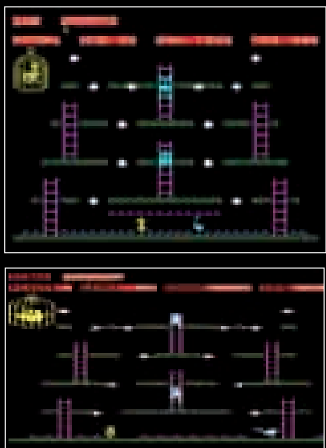


IN THE KNOW

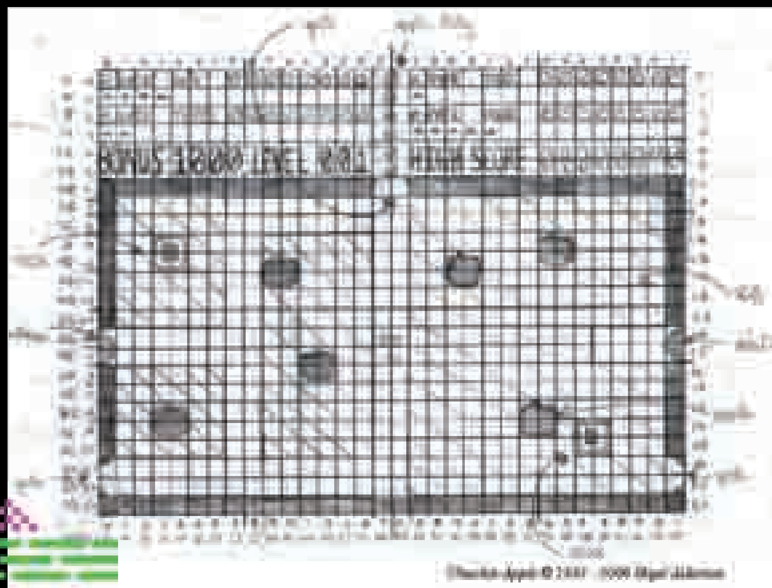


» **PUBLISHER:** A+F SOFTWARE
» **DEVELOPER:** NIGEL ALDERTON
» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+

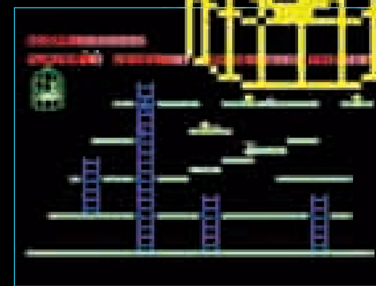
THE MAKING OF… CHUCKIE EGG



» Level 8 differs slightly in egg layout in the Spectrum (top) and BBC Micro versions.



» The design document for the never completed *Chuckie Apple* (courtesy of http://www.bagshot-row.org/chuckie-egg/)



» The MSX version uses a variety of colours and gives Harry a bigger hat.

Hen House Harry, the lifts, the hens and mother duck all differ, while movement of Harry (especially while jumping) has a different rhythm in the BBC version. The BBC Micro also suffers from a bug, where it is possible to fall through the lift if the timing of the jump is not right. Level 8 has some layout alterations, where the arrangement of the eggs are stacked in a different way. The Spectrum and BBC Micro games are the ones that are most fondly remembered, with the latter often sneakily played by schoolchildren on their classroom machines when the teacher wasn't looking. Initially nameless, the game's main character was christened Hen House Harry by "a bloke at A+F who wrote the blurb for the back of the cassette," according to Alderton.

In 1983, *Chuckie Egg* would be released and the self-publishing nature of the business meant a lot of the packing was done in-house. "If a big order came in, everyone mucked in. Blank audio cassettes were unboxed and the card inserts replaced with the ones for the game, the blank tapes were put into cassette decks to record from the master, then re-boxed when they had finished recording. All done by hand."

Shortly after its release on Spectrum and BBC Micro, the company would convert *Chuckie Egg* to other computer formats including Dragon 32, C64, Electron, MSX, Amstrad and Einstein; and although Nigel Alderton wasn't involved with the ports, he was impressed with the results. "Most of the conversions are excellent, especially given the hardware restrictions of some of the machines like the C64 and Acorn Electron. I think the BBC version is probably the slickest, but I prefer my Spectrum original!"

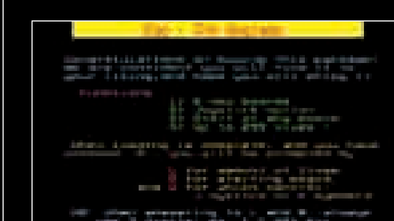
Interestingly enough, its appeal is because the game can't be completed – with the pattern looping at level 40, Hen House Harry gets to carry on, seemingly destined to collect eggs and avoid rampaging birds for the rest of his natural life. Although the pattern remains the same, from level 48 the clock time decreases, making the game far more challenging without the need to add more content. *Chuckie Egg* is a high score game, where many gamers spend countless hours notching up points in the millions, trying to outdo each other to become the best *Chuckie Egg* player. Alderton explains that its lack of an ending was all part of the original design: "It was a conscious decision. I didn't enjoy the feeling of completing a game – I preferred it to go on and on."

The pressures of time to get the game finished meant that there were some ideas that never made it into the game, including the concept of two mother ducks chasing Hen House Harry around

> "I WANTED TO HAVE AN EXTRA EIGHT LEVELS WHERE THERE ARE TWO FLYING BIRDS CHASING YOU SIMULTANEOUSLY INSTEAD OF ONE" NIGEL ALDERTON



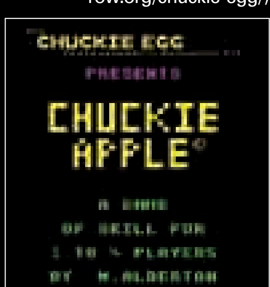
» Amiga and Atari ST versions had a graphical revamp, but suffered in the gameplay department.



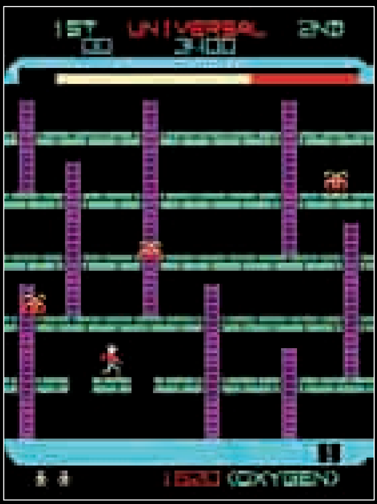
» Unofficial versions were released, including this one which featured new levels and incorporated cheats (BBC Micro).

THE GAME THAT NEVER WAS

Despite not having any input into official sequel *Chuckie Egg 2 (Choccy Egg)*, Nigel Alderton began work on a new game in the series entitled *Chuckie Apple* on the Spectrum. Aiming to be similar in style to *Mr Do*, it was to feature "lots of bouncing apples and things". Sadly, it never even reached programming status. "Like *Chuckie Egg* it borrowed heavily from arcade games, but it barely got past the concept stage because I went to work for Ocean Software as an employee and I lost interest in it," recalls Alderton. "I did do some drawings at the time which I found recently. I don't think it would have been as good as *Chuckie Egg*." A PDF containing early drawings and general gameplay information about *Chuckie Apple* can be found at The Chuckie Egg Professional Resource Kit website (http://www.bagshot-row.org/chuckie-egg/)



"I HAVEN'T MADE ANY MONEY OUT OF IT FOR YEARS BUT THE BRAGGING RIGHTS ARE PRICELESS" NIGEL ALDERTON



» This is *Space Panic*, the source (alongside *Donkey Kong*) of Nigel Alderton's inspiration.

the screen. There has been something of a widespread myth that two mother ducks featured in the original *Chuckie Egg* but we would like to debunk this right now as down to someone who has possibly been eating too many eggs. It was an idea that Nigel Alderton would have liked to have implemented though. "There were a couple of ideas which I wanted to include and just about had the memory available to do so, but didn't because A+F were putting pressure on me to get the game released. If they hadn't it may never have got finished. I wanted to have an extra eight levels where there are two flying birds chasing you simultaneously instead of just one. Then a further eight levels where there are two flying birds plus the ostriches. Then a further eight levels where there are two flying birds, plus the ostriches, plus disappearing ladders. I could have gone on forever!"

The sales of *Chuckie Egg* meant that A+F Software was keen to capitalise on the game's success so they worked internally on the sequel *Chuckie Egg 2 (Choccy Egg)*. But as Nigel Alderton had just been a freelancer for A+F for the original game and then left to work for Ocean Software on *Kong Strikes Back*, the direction of the series was left entirely to the whim of the internal development team. "I wasn't involved in *Chuckie Egg 2* at all," says Alderton. "I didn't like the original concept, nor did I like the way A+F went about fleshing out the design, which was basically 'design-by-committee'." An entirely different style of game, *Choccy Egg* involved Hen House Harry navigating 120 screens in a *Dizzy* wannabe adventure, collecting items to help run a chocolate factory of Easter Eggs. Although popular enough to warrant releases on the Amiga and Atari ST, the game failed to emerge from the shadow of the original, suffering from its adventure game pretensions under the *Chuckie Egg* branding.

While A+F continued to release games such as *Cylon Attack*, *Kamakazi*, *Orpheus* and *Pharaoh's Tomb*, none lived up to the genius of *Chuckie Egg* or brought the kind of sales that the latter accumulated (over a million) and the company went bust in 1985. It would re-emerge as MC Lothlorien (later renamed Icon Design and then Tudor World), producing hurried conversions of both *Chuckie Egg* games for Amiga, Atari ST and PC in the late Eighties before also folding in 1991.

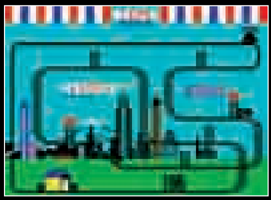
The advent of the internet has meant that *Chuckie Egg* fever has since gone into overdrive, with many fans setting up websites and creating remakes. "The amount of work that must go into them is incredible and very flattering," says Alderton. "Yes I've played a few of them, and some of their creators have been in touch by email just out of courtesy. One guy has even printed a *Chuckie Egg* T-shirt!" *Chuckie Egg*'s popularity remains unabated and recent Retro Gamer reader polls have shown the game feature prominently in gamers' hearts, showing up at number 28 out of 100 in issue nine and number 8 in issue 37 respectively. "I'm very proud. I haven't made any money out of it for years but the bragging rights are priceless," says Alderton. "I can't pinpoint the secret of its success if it has one, but at the time I designed it I was addicted to arcade games and I'm sure that helped somehow."

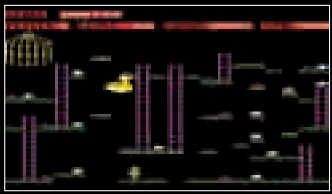
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

KONG STRIKES BACK
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1985

COMMANDO
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985

GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1986

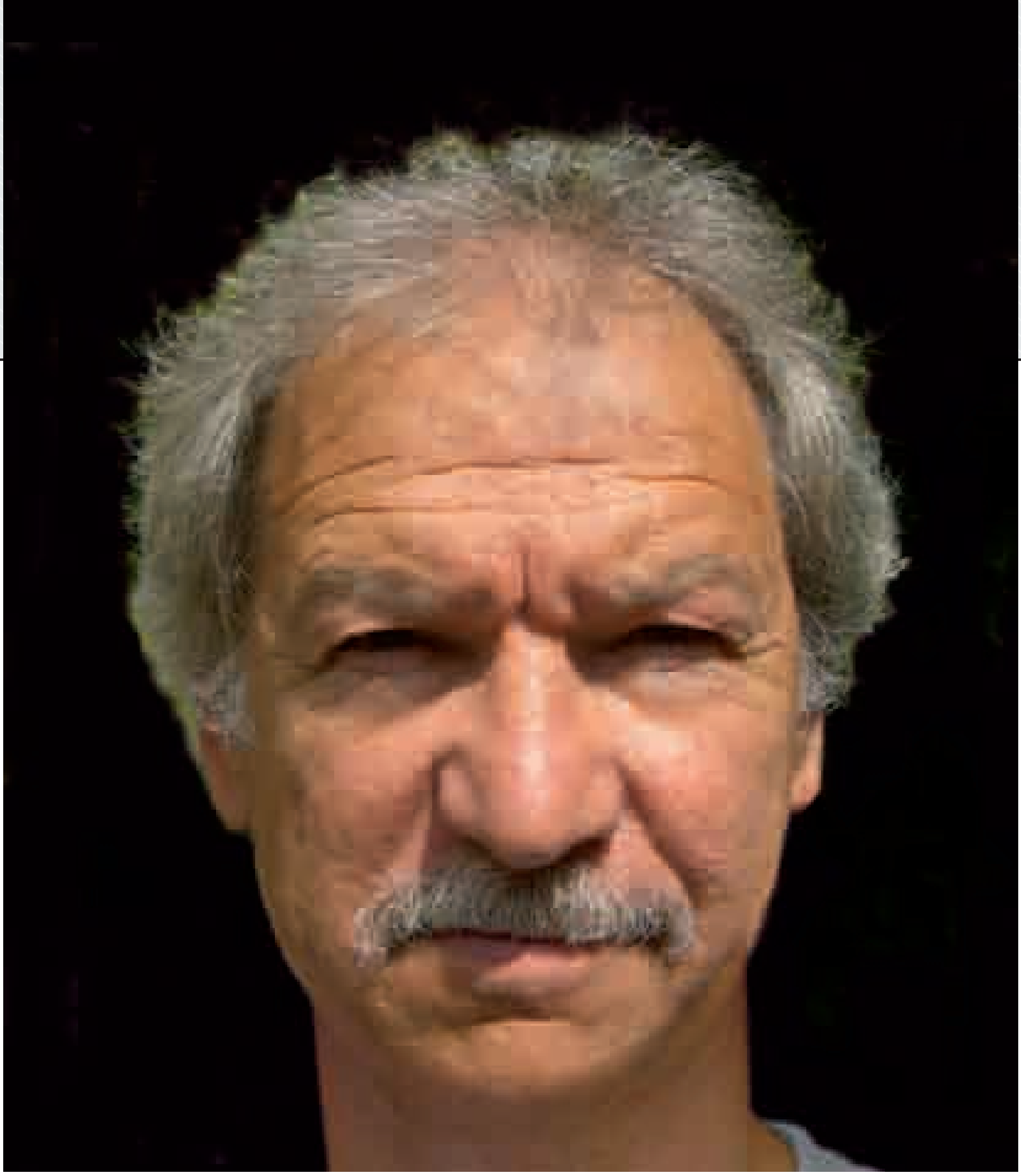




» A hacked version of *Chuckie Egg* (BBC Micro) was released to the community with extra colours.

In the chair with...

IF YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF EMBROILED IN THE OLD 'CAN GAMES BE ART' DEBATE, THERE'S ONLY ONE NAME YOU NEED TO KNOW. MEL CROUCHER'S SURREAL FLIGHTS OF FANCY TOOK COMPUTER GAMES INTO THE REALM OF TECHNOLOGICAL PERFORMANCE, SO WE THOUGHT IT WAS HIGH TIME DAN WHITEHEAD QUIZZED HIM ABOUT HIS, AHEM, UNIQUE GAMING OUTLOOK...



MEL CROUCHER

Maybe it's because its most prolific practitioners tend to cultivate their craft locked away in offices, glued to the luminous glow of a computer monitor, but the world of videogames is not renowned for its mavericks. Sure, you'll get the occasional studio head with a fondness for taking outrageous swipes at the opposition, or a developer that specialises in quirky ideas, but we're not exactly spoilt for choice when it comes to the gaming equivalent of a Captain Beefheart or Pablo Picasso.

In fact, if you're looking for a true two-fingers-to-convention maverick spirit driven by a genuine need to pioneer games as something more than just pixellated distractions, the list boils down to just one name: Mel Croucher.

A trained architect, journalist and novelist, avant-garde musician, cartoonist and games designer – the anarchistic intellectual rebel to Jeff Minter's amiable hippy – it's fair to say that Croucher's most famous (and infamous) games have yet to be equalled in terms of sheer oddball spirit or lunatic ambition. It'd be nice to say that his esoteric ideas were still hugely influential to this day, but that would sadly be little more than fantasy. Powered by the sort of conceptual thinking that would have the art world all a-twitter were it applied to something more respectable than mere computer games, precious little of his radical vision of gaming as a medium for exploring the boundaries of multimedia can still be seen in the current line-up of ultraviolent shooters, glossy racers and anthropomorphic platform heroes.

Of course, the very concept of interactive games was virtually unheard of when Mel first encountered the world of computers in 1967. "I think the language was Algol, and I was definitely using punch-cards to store the data," he recalls. "The computer was big enough to walk around inside, although I'm afraid I can't remember what sort of a machine it was." The mysterious machine was on loan to the Portsmouth School of Architecture – "maybe it belonged to the military," he muses, "and we were being processed for something amusingly paranoid" – but it's rather revealing that Mel's first programming effort had little to do with buttresses or building elevations. "After a few weeks I got it to play 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' on a Dubreq Stylofone," he grins, "Having achieved this feat, I knew I had absolutely no idea why. Does that count as a computer game?"

It would take another 13 years for the world of consumer electronics to catch up to Croucher's imagination. By 1980, Mel was running a company called Automata making "interactive audio guides and cruddy little radio shows". It was then that he bought a Sinclair ZX80, in kit form, at a Wembley trade fair and decided to see what it could do. "I decided to use it as a propaganda weapon by the time the bar closed," he laughs. Many of the concepts that now seem so wilfully revolutionary in the early Automata output actually stem from the fact that they were making it up as they went along. Approaching the realm of computer games

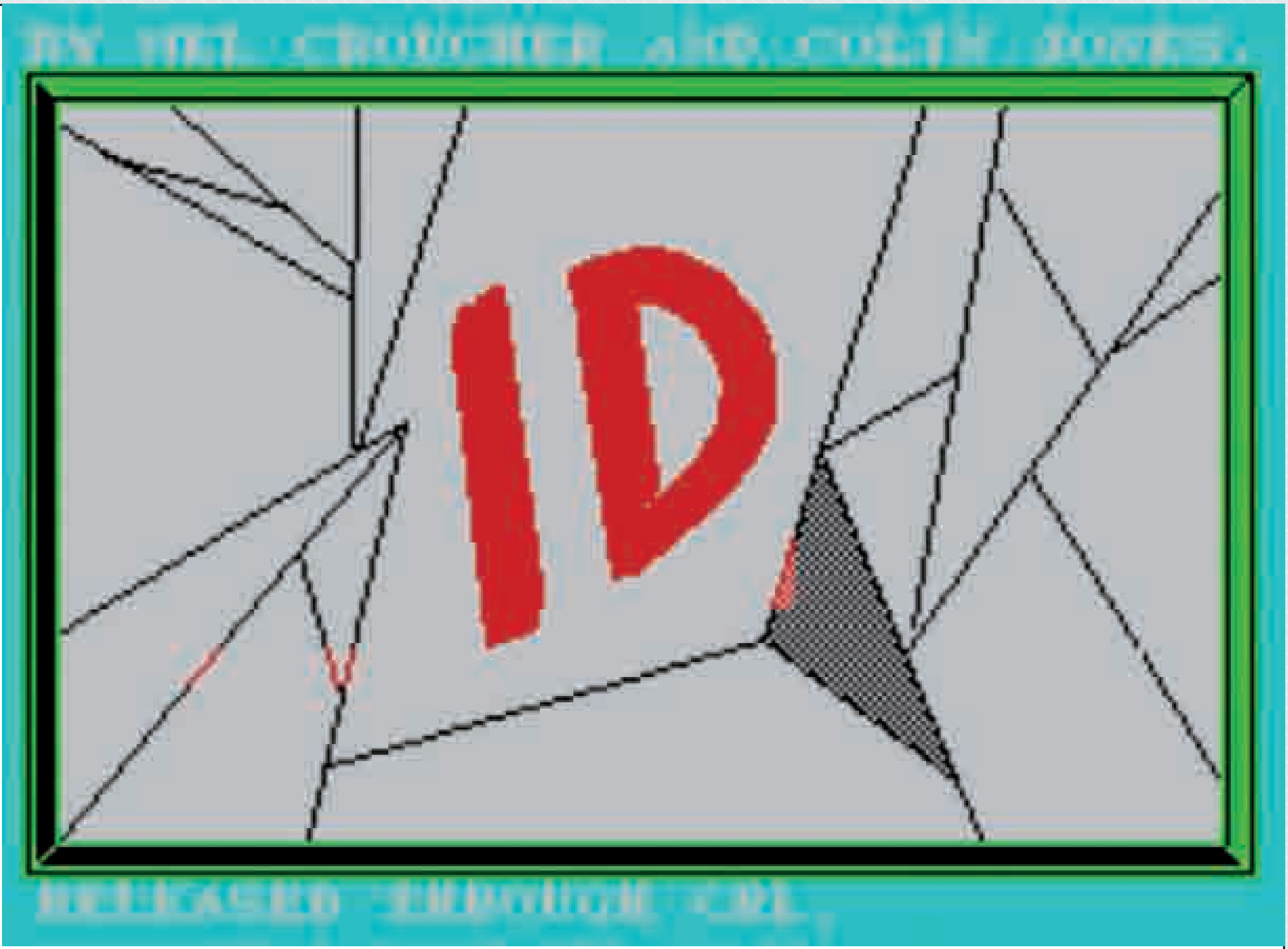
IN THE KNOW

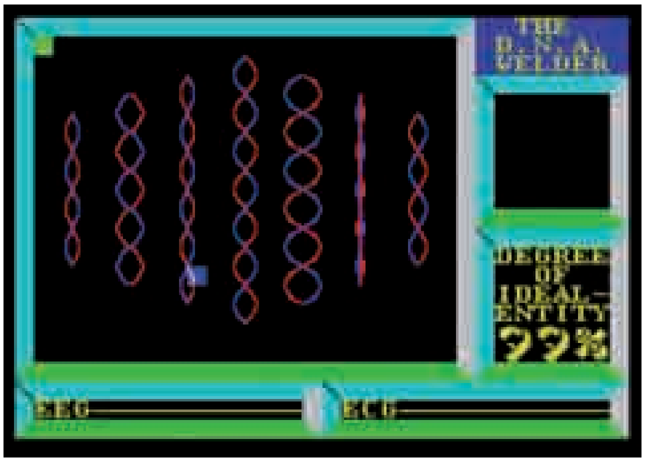
IN BRIEF...

Flourishing in the early days of home computing as only true British eccentrics could, Mel Croucher and his Automata software label helped defined their era not through gameplay or graphics (though they weren't lacking in either) but in attitude, with their esoteric concepts, puckish humour and multimedia mindset. As the industry lost its innocence, it also lost Croucher - but those who hold a torch for original thinking still remember his subversive achievements with a sly grin.

"PING-PONG NOW INVOLVES HIGH-DEFINITION SLAUGHTER AND CHESS IS NOW CALLED THE DA VINCI CODE"

» Tease the cosmic truth from *iD* by answering the questions that really matter…







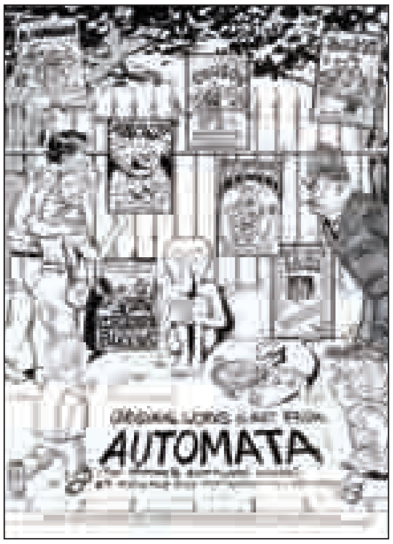
» **Left:** *Deus Ex Machina.* Protect the 'ideal entity' through the Seven Stages of Man, in sync with the taped soundtrack. **Right:** *Pi-Eyed,* another Piman spin-off, found the big-nosed fella being chased by cars as he raced to get drunk.

Writing wrongs

As well as his attempts to transform early home computers into vessels of mind-buggering surreal art, Mel Croucher has also ploughed his own furrow as a journalist and writer for hire. His regular column in Zzap! 64 is the stuff of legend, a monthly melange of linguistic mischief that warped the minds of an entire generation of children – an achievement he claims gave him "enormous pleasure".

"I've always written," he explains. "It doesn't matter what. Computer manuals, comedy scripts, subversive pamphlets, corporate flyers, I am a scribbling harlot… I will write stuff for money".

And it's through his writing that he maintains a somewhat distant association with our beloved hobby. "I'll keep the link going with computer games until I drop," he says. "The Zygote column and the Great Moments cartoon strip in Computer Shopper have been going since the 1980s, and I suppose I'll keep writing 'em as long as people want to keep reading 'em."



» An early Automata ad in all its cartoon glory – notice Mel's cameo as Robinson Crusoe!



» The first ever Automata advert, a masterpiece of lo-tech cut and paste salesmanship!

from a broader media perspective, there were no established rules as to how games were supposed to look or play.

"I didn't think computer games were all that different, so there was no reason to start a new company," he explains when asked about the evolution of Automata from audio production outfit to leftfield games factory. "That's also why everything we produced had an audio soundtrack and cartoon strips from the beginning. I thought that was how computer games were supposed to be. Like movies or theatre, but a bit more crude."

These cartoons would become a central part of Automata's appeal, regularly appearing on the back cover of Computer Shopper magazine and promising bizarre gaming experiences accompanied by Spike Milligan-style wordplay, hand-written text and manic comic panels that called to mind the American underground 'freak' comics of Robert Crumb crossed with the scatty British eccentricities of Leo Baxendale. Another early comparison would be B-movie mogul Roger Corman, whose upstart productions in the Fifties and Sixties came from an ethos of taking a movie from idea to screen in as short a time as possible.

"We were knocking out one game a day in the beginning, then another day to think up a storyline and some marketing palaver," Mel remembers. "Then I'd record the music and my chum Robin Evans would draw the artwork, and within three or four days we'd have an advert running on the back of a magazine, and start hand-duplicating the cassettes."

Such a crazed fanzine-style work ethic wouldn't get you very far in today's industry, but Automata had the luxury of not having to generate hit after hit just to stay afloat. They'd already produced over 20 titles by the time of their first genuine taste of fame. *Pimania* was a 1982 adventure game inspired by Kit Williams's best-selling book, *Masquerade*. Players were promised that the first person to solve the game would be given a clue to a real place and time. Whoever turned up at the allotted rendezvous would receive a golden sundial worth £6,000. Like so many great ideas, it sounded great in theory but proved troublesome in practice: "I reckon the biggest mistake I made with *Pimania* was only allowing the winner to be in the right place at the right time once a year," Mel reveals. "I figured someone would crack it in the first year, but it took a whole lot longer than that. You can't let prize games go on too long: people get sceptical. Then they get abusive." In the end, the prize was finally claimed in 1985, but not before the gaming press had begun to suggest that the whole thing was a publicity stunt.

Some good did come from the experiment, as it led to the creation of Piman, a freakish cartoon character with a peculiar phallic nose, and he soon became one of British software's first break-out characters – helped in no small part by his appearances in the Automata adverts. Yet despite what you may have heard, Piman was more than just an early attempt at corporate branding – he was gaming's very own Santa Claus.

"The Piman wasn't a mascot," Mel deadpans. "He was a real person. Kids would phone up to talk to him, and we couldn't let them down, could we? If your magazine suggested the Piman was fictitious, you'd traumatise all the middle-managers who have believed in him since they were kids."

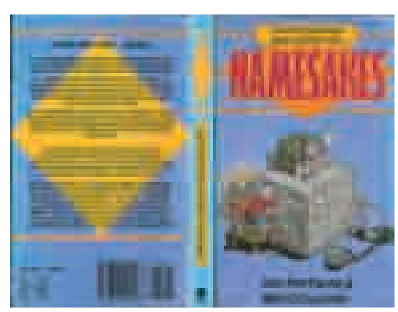
With the Automata name established, 1984 found Mel hatching plans for *Deus Ex Machina*, a wildly conceptual experience that would bear little resemblance to the identikit games already cluttering the shelves of Woolworths. The game itself – really a collection of seven challenges that combine to form a virtual life – was a typically ambitious mixture of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Orwell's *1984* and Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

"I wanted to make the computer-game equivalent of *Citizen Kane*," Mel says, modestly. "Something that would still be enjoyed years after I'd packed up my tent and shuffled off. I think I'd secretly had enough by then, and I wanted to go out with a bang, so I believed the world was ready for an interactive, multimedia extravaganza that pissed all over the tedious

» Aah, the days when children's computer games revolved around smoking and drinking.



"I THOUGHT THAT WAS HOW COMPUTER GAMES WERE SUPPOSED TO BE. LIKE MOVIES OR THEATRE, BUT A BIT MORE CRUDE"



» *Namesakes* was a bit like *Call My Bluff* but in book form.

FROM WEIRD TO WIRED

For someone with such an anti-corporate reputation, you may be surprised to learn that some of Mel's most recent projects have involved protecting the rich and famous from the nefarious antics of technological troublemakers. After discovering how much of his own work was being openly traded online, he set up My-Reputation.com to help celebrities and companies understand and protect the value of their digital assets.

"I reckoned a celeb, or brand, or company can survive most things, except losing their reputation and the fastest way to do that in the 21st Century was going to be online," he explains. The project found the one-time enfant terrible of Spectrum games working for Eminem, Prince and Janet Jackson. It also fulfilled a lifelong ambition, allowing him to work with the family of his greatest hero, Frank Zappa.

Currently, Mel heads up a BAFTA-nominated collective of designers, artists, developers and musicians, producing websites and multimedia promotions. "I used to relish a few hundred people accessing my stuff when I started out in computer games," Mel grins. "Now, thanks to the web, the world is my mussel."

shoot-'em-ups and simulations that had come to dominate the market."

Adding to the game's bizarre reputation was the accompanying soundtrack tape which was designed to be played alongside the game, filling in the backstory and exploring the game's concepts. Most Automata games used the B-side of their cassette for some peculiar song or other, but *Deus Ex Machina* took the idea into places previously reserved for prog rock concept albums, foreshadowing something that would later become commonplace in the process. Famous actors and celebrities such as former Doctor Who Jon Pertwee, king of the double entendre Frankie Howerd and rhythm stick evangelist Ian Dury all appeared on the tape, giving the project a multimedia allure that the tinny Spectrum speakers could never allow.

Mel recalls, "I think it was the first computerised entertainment that used real actors. I reckon we were ten years too early. There had been celebrity endorsements before, but don't forget I thought I was making interactive movies, so it wasn't so much using a celebrity cast as using the right voice for the role."

While *Deus Ex Machina* certainly struck a chord with the press, Automata ended up selling it via mail order as Britain's stuffy retail chains simply didn't know how to sell it. By the time it won a Game of the Year award in 1985, it had only sold around a thousand copies. Mel's patience with the increasingly corporate games industry was wearing thin but, in 1986, a project came



» *iD* was developed for, and published by, CRL's Nu Wave label.

along that refreshed his interest in interactive entertainment. Clem Chambers of CRL had an idea for a game in which players had to coax a virtual personality out of their computer, and wanted the unique Croucher worldview to make it happen. *iD* would be the result, and it would mark one of the final games projects to fully benefit from the mind of Mel.

"I was considering going back to being an architect, but people kept asking me to do something else involving computer games. I first met Clem when he was still at school and he once did me a kindness, unasked, which is the best kind. Besides, he was more persistent than the rest, and I was happy to do it. I wanted to see if I could turn a few kilobytes of dynamic memory not only into a true artificial intelligence, but an intelligence that behaved according to the veracity and proclivity of the player. In other words, if you won its trust, it wouldn't just reward you, it would become you. Bollocks of course, but not bad for 48K."

However, as games went from cottage industry to multinational concern, there was less and less room for the sort of intellectual mischief perpetrated by the likes of Mel Croucher. The writing was on the wall.

"I found myself walking out of the High Court, having taken on a multinational conglomerate who had the idea they could bully independent games companies into submission. I won on the day, but it was the beginning of the end. I could see the way it was going to go, and sadly, it went."

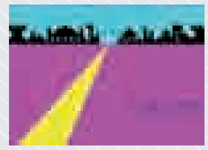
Needless to say, for someone who claims to have never played any computer games other than his own, Mel has precious little time for the grinding gears of the modern business of videogaming. "The current games industry is risible," he scoffs. "I used to say that there are only two computer games in the world, ping-pong and chess. Ping-pong now involves high-definition slaughter and chess is now called The Da Vinci Code. For God's sake. No, I don't think I could have succeeded in today's games industry."

HIGHLIGHTS

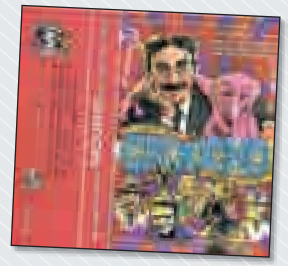
MEL'S TOP TIPS



Name: Pimania
System: ZX81, ZX Spectrum, BBC Micro
Year: 1982



A perennial fixture of tips pages everywhere, *Pimania* wouldn't even begin until you worked out the keyword to start the game. It's the sort of adventure that makes The Times crossword look like a Daily Star anagram puzzle.



» Help Piman and Groucho Marx identify the mystery Hollywood star and a trip to LA could have been yours!

Name: Groucho
System: ZX Spectrum
Year Released: 1983

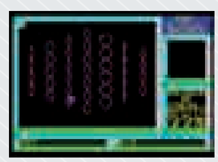


Also known as *My Name Is Uncle Groucho And You Win A Fat Cigar.* Piman teams up with Groucho Marx for a typically skewed Hollywood adventure with yet another real-life prize at the end – a fancy trip to Los Angeles.



» *Deus Ex Machina* was conceived and sold as an interactive multimedia movie experience.

Name: Deus Ex Machina
Systems: ZX Spectrum, C64
Year released: 1984



Five… four… three… two… one… pause. Jon Pertwee counts down your journey into one of the most ambitiously imaginative games ever written, in which the last mouse on Earth does a poo in a computer and creates… something alive.

Name: iD
Systems: ZX Spectrum
Year Released: 1986



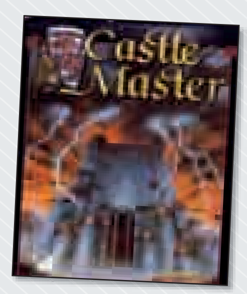


Converse with an ancient intelligence trapped in your Speccy and try to help it remember the forms it has taken throughout history. The only game in history where victory comes from abstract concepts, colour-coded moods and Adolf Hitler!

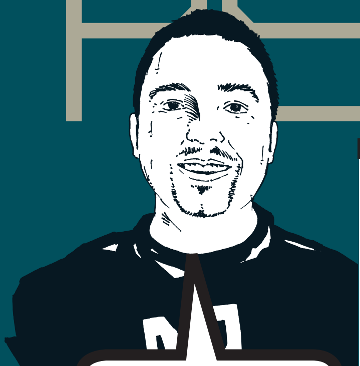
Name: Castle Master
System: ZX Spectrum, C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC
Year Released: 1990



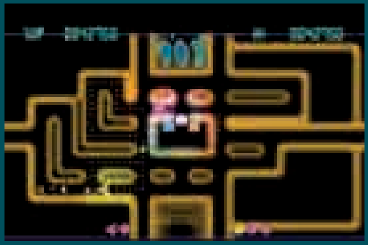
The third game to use Incentive's famous Freescape 3D modelling engine, *Castle Master*'s labyrinthine dungeons and towering spires also boasted "story and cryptic clues" by a certain Mr Croucher.

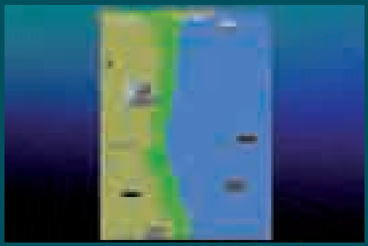


RETRORATED



Xbox Live Arcade is really starting to come of age at the moment, and there have been some quite frankly brilliant releases over the past few months. As always, Retro Gamer is here to tell you what to download, and what to avoid like the proverbial plague.





PAC-MAN CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
» **MARKET POINT COST:** 800

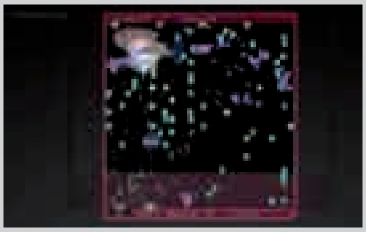


Now this is how you do an update. Namco's new edition of *Pac-Man* is absolutely stunning and proves it's perfectly possible to take a great game and make it brilliant again with just a few careful tweaks. The beauty of *Pac-Man Championship Edition* is that you only have five or ten minutes to score as many points as possible, so you'll approach it completely differently to the 27-year-old original. Each maze is split into two distinct halves and a cleared side won't refill with new pills until you've picked up the fruit that appears in the other half of the maze. Add in the fact that you can increase your score multiplier by eating extra power-pills before the effect of the original wears off and the potential for huge scores becomes massive. Some gamers have moaned about the price tag, but when you consider the extra modes, addictive gameplay and the constant desire to climb the online leaderboards, the £6 charge seems like a small price to play.

CENTIPEDE/MILLIPEDE

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** STAINLESS GAMES
» **MARKET POINT COST:** 400



We were always concerned how *Centipede* would transfer across to Xbox Live Arcade (the original used a trackball after all) but we've been pretty impressed with Atari's conversion.

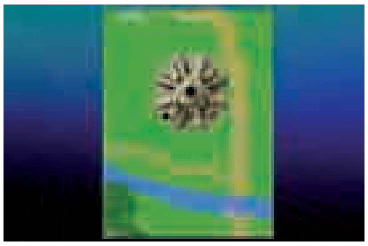
Granted, the enhanced mode is a garish mess that looks like a cat with a pus-filled mouth has continually thrown up on your TV screen, but the original mode looks lovely. Atari has also kindly included *Centipede*'s sequel *Millipede*, meaning that you're essentially getting two games for your 400 points – and while it's extremely similar to the original game, there are enough differences that it could have easily been released as a stand-alone title.

All in all, this is a very solid effort that's definitely worth the paltry asking price and shows that value for money can exist on a format like Xbox Live Arcade.

XEVIOUS

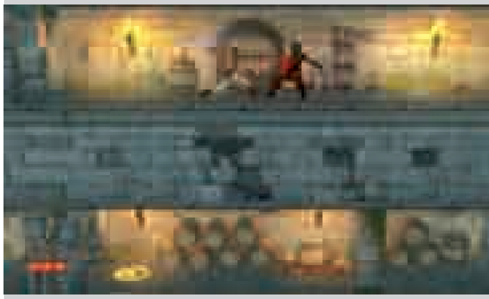
INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
» **MARKET POINT COST:** 400



Campbell will no doubt have our guts for garters, but *Xevious,* like Konami's *Rush 'N Attack,* is a rather disappointing release that will probably have new gamers wondering why everyone made such a fuss about these "classic" games in the first place.

Xevious may play an important role in the history of shoot-'em-ups but that doesn't mean it's still fun to play now. With its painfully slow pace, annoying music and simplistic gameplay, *Xevious* just feels very out of place when you consider the other shooters that are currently available on Microsoft's online service. Check out the trial version by all means, but there are far better ways to spend 400 points.



PRINCE OF PERSIA CLASSIC

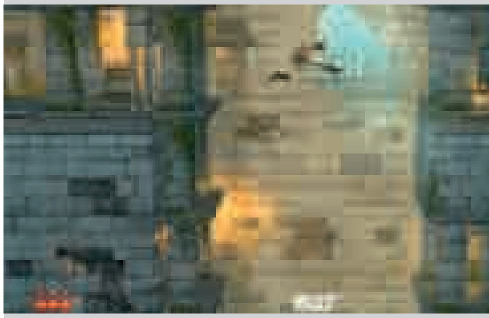
INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** GAMELOFT
» **MARKET POINT COST:** 800

Ubisoft's *Prince Of Persia Classic* has seemingly come out of nowhere, and along with the excellent *Pac-Man Championship Edition,* has set a new standard for future remakes.

Although it features an identical layout to the original game, developer Gameloft has essentially re-skinned *POPC* to look like *Sands Of Time*, and as a result has created the best-looking game on Live Arcade. The prince himself is beautifully animated and has received a number of new moves including a backward somersault, a forward roll and the ability to run up and jump off walls.

Not only do these new moves look fantastic, they've been perfectly implemented into the original gameplay and don't break Mechner's 18-year-old level design in any way at all. Granted, it's not perfect – sword fighting is still as clumsy as ever – but the beautifully paced gameplay, Time Trial and Survival modes and the ability to race against a ghost of yourself on previously completed levels means that there's more than enough here to justify the 800 points asking price.



RUSH 'N ATTACK



INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE

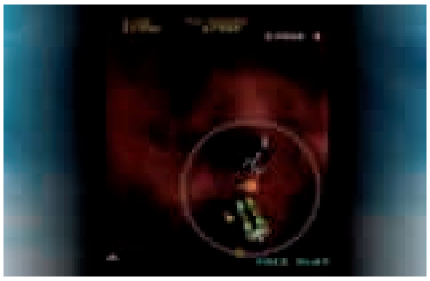
» **MARKET POINT COST:** 400

The years have not been kind to Konami's *Rush 'N Attack* (or *Green Beret* as more gamers will know it by). While Digital Eclipse has done another impressive conversion, there just isn't enough here to keep you entertained. Pushing up on the joystick to jump may be authentic to the original arcade experience, but it doesn't feel natural in practice and you'll find yourself subconsciously trying to push a button instead.

Then, of course, there's the monotonous gameplay that requires you to do little more than hammer away on the fire button. Other noticeable problems include some iffy collision detection and the typically laggy online options.

Rush 'N Attack may well have been a classic back in its day, but it's now looking pretty damned tired. Not really worth the points by any stretch of the imagination.

GYRUSS



INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE

» **MARKET POINT COST:** 400

If *Xevious* is the miserable elder sister who is long past her sell by date, then *Gyruss* is her dazzling nubile sibling who can stop you short with a toss of her hair and a naughty wink.

There may be only a year's difference between Konami's *Gyruss* and Namco's *Xevious*, but it makes for one hell of a gap as far as gameplay is concerned. Whereas *Xevious* is slow 'n' steady, *Gyruss* is a ridiculously hectic take on *Tempest* that features fast-paced gameplay, some impressive (for the time) visuals and a constantly increasing challenge that becomes worryingly addictive. Effectively playing like a 3D version of *Galaxian*, *Gyruss* has you hurtling around the outside of the screen as you rack up points by taking out aliens, asteroids or anything else that gets in your way. It's a great way to spend 400 points and is easily one of the best shooters on Live Arcade.

ROD-LAND

DON'T WALK UNDER LADDERS



- » **PUBLISHER:** JALECO
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ (PCB BOARD)



HISTORY

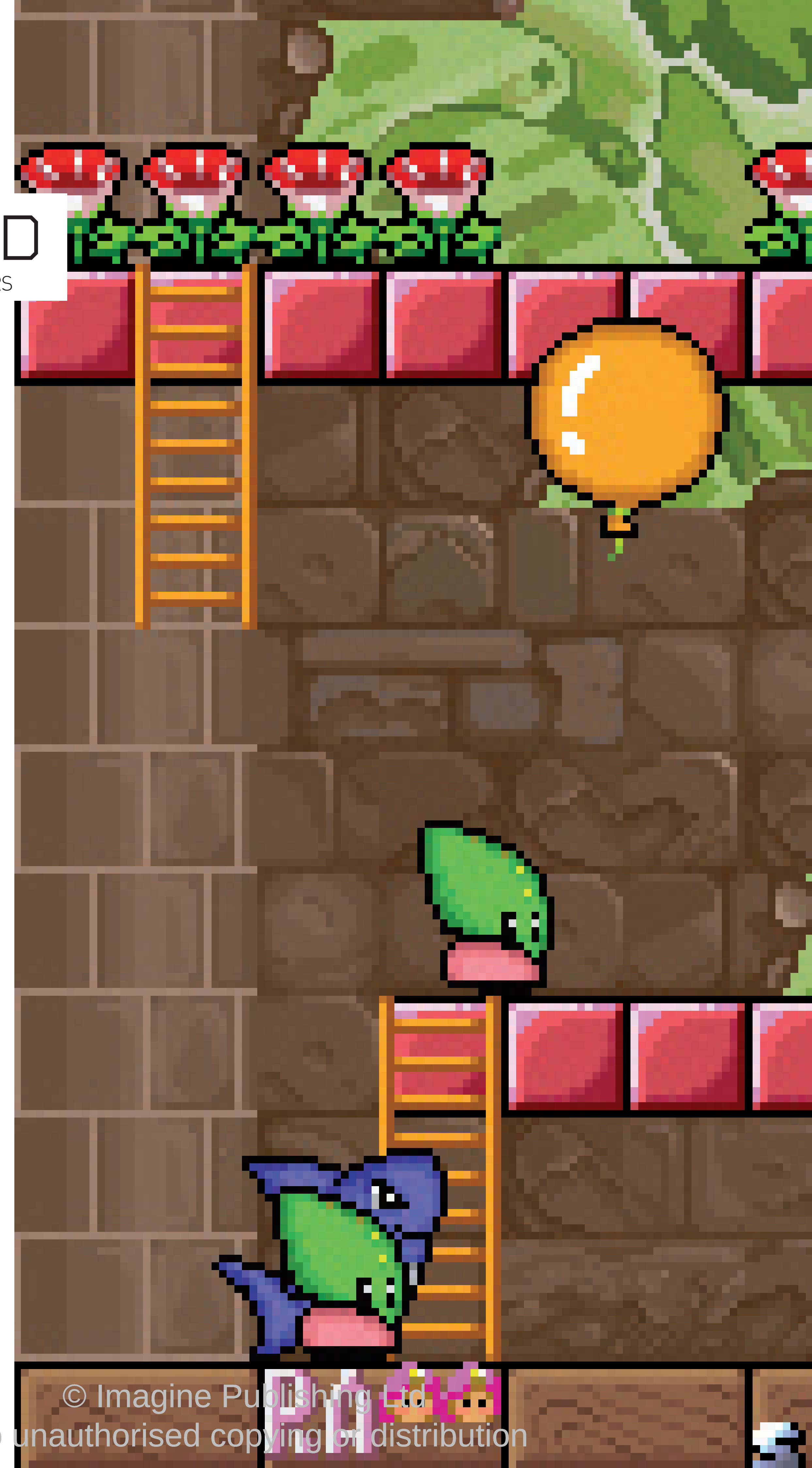
When *Bubble Bobble* first appeared in 1986 it instantly captivated gamers with its distinctive visuals, fiendishly addictive gameplay and numerous hidden secrets. Thanks to its massive popularity, a number of other publishers quickly jumped on the bandwagon and delivered their own spin on Taito's hit coin-op.

Jaleco's effort was called *Rod-Land* and it's easily one of the best clones available, especially if you're into cute fairies.

With a story laid out by some simplistic yet beautiful-looking cut-scenes, Rit and Tam must climb a huge tower in order to save their mother from an evil Minotaur king. With the flimsy storyline in place it's down to the two courageous siblings to ascend to the top of the tower, clearing 31 stages of platform mayhem along the way.

While they're cuter than a three-year-old that's been injected with apple-pie dimple implants, the two fairies are far from defenceless and are perfectly capable of dealing with their ridiculously cute adversaries. Each sibling has a nifty little rod that can capture enemies. Once stunned, the captured foes can be repeatedly pounded into the ground until they turn into bonus items such as rockets and bombs, which will do even more damage. Along with their handy rods, the two fairies can also create a magical ladder that will enable them to avoid close encounters or get to otherwise unreachable areas. It's a clever little game mechanic that adds greatly to the already strategic gameplay.

While all enemies must be destroyed before you can move on to the next level, more experienced gamers will instead try to collect the many flowers that appear on each stage. As well as giving you some hefty bonus points, successfully collecting all the plants turns the remaining enemies red and gives them an unwelcome burst of speed. Any foes you catch now, though, will give you bonus letters and once the word 'EXTRA' is spelled out you'll gain a new life.





BARGAIN HUNT

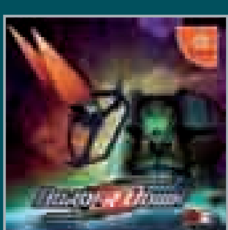
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japanese auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over 100 different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it!

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. As you may have noticed, we've changed the theme recently and are looking at specific catagories. This month: Dreamcast shoot-'em-ups.

BORDER DOWN
Dreamcast
Normally sells for **£60**
Ended at **£89.01**



TWINKLE STAR SPRITES
Dreamcast
Normally sells for **£35**
Ended at **£18.67**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**

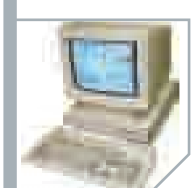


PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!

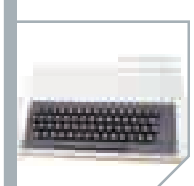
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

ACORN



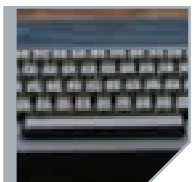
ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (with games)**

Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**

Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**

Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**

A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.

- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**

Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built-in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**

Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.

- RENEGADE
- RICK DANGEROUS
- GRYZOR



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**

Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.

- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE



APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) (with games)**

Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built and sold to enthusiasts.

- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**

Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.

- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+**

Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.

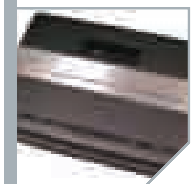
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

- ROCKING HORSE SHIT
- HEN'S TEETH
- LUCKY FIND
- EBAY REGULAR
- CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



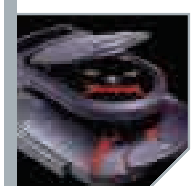
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

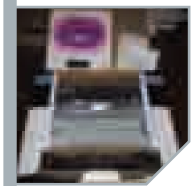


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
This is an Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models available, of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

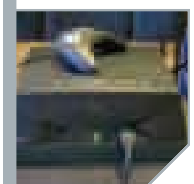
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) (prices fluctuate wildly)**
Ultra-rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



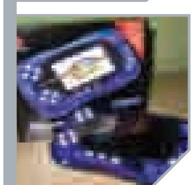
PIPPIN (ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. Its high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) (more with games, depending on model)**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models with differing specs. The Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



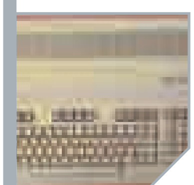
C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well-known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the best-selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND

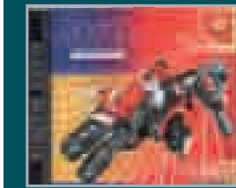


C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

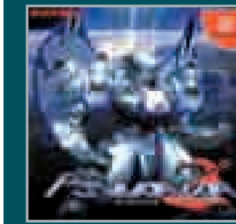


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

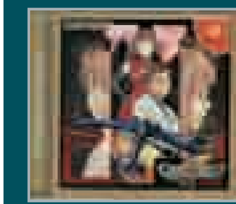
MARS MATRIX
Dreamcast
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£12.56**



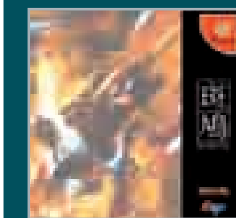
PSYVARIAR 2: THE WILL TO FABRICATE
Dreamcast
Normally sells for **£40**
Ended at **£62.45**



GIGA WING 2
Dreamcast
Normally sells for **£30**
Ended at **£53**



IKARUGA
Dreamcast
Normally sells for **£45**
Ended at **£74.11**



ZERO GUNNER 2
Normally sells for **£30**
Ended at **£15.18**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D

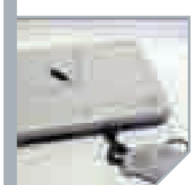


VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**
The computer that established the Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU

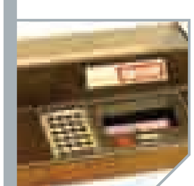


FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**
Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**
A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



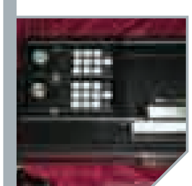
BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**
Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
- Mortal Kombat: Armageddon - Wii
- Hour of Victory- Xbox 360
- Monster House - Happy Feet - PS2



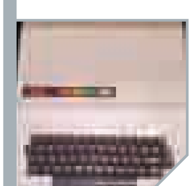
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
More inanity from the Land of the Rising Sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (from the USA)**
The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**
Coleco's third-generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
- CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) (very cheap on eBay)**
Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived, though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



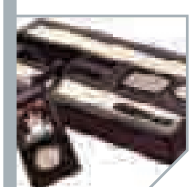
ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Failed console by Emerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, it was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**
Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**
After manufacturing MSX machines, Sony re-entered the games hardware market and this time took it over. There are countless excellent PS games. It was later re-released as the PSone, which is more expensive but looks much nicer.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPÉ
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) (allegedly for a mint system)**
Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupé was a unique 8-bit British home computer that didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



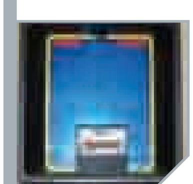
SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



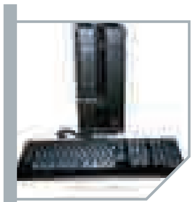
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

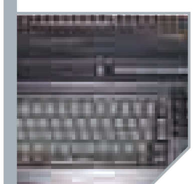
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent home-brew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER



MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

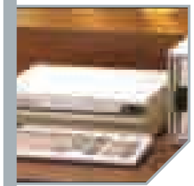
NEC



PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) (prices can fluctuate)**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC Engine with AV output.



PC ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two systems' Hu-Cards are not compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) (massive fluctuations)**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- BLOODY WOLF
- NINJA SPIRIT



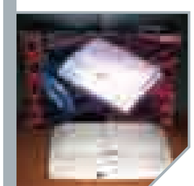
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) (prices can fluctuate)**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had six games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.

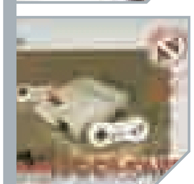


DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped-down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a six-button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over 1,000 games to choose from!



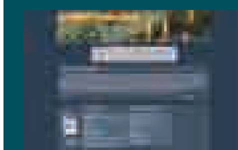
FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.



FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

RETRO GAMING SITES

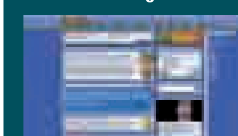
SHOOT-THE-CORE
Hundreds of great home-brew shooters, many downloadable for free. While not a retro site as such, the influence of past classics is obvious. Shoot-The-Core is bound to rekindle your passion for shoot-'em-ups.
http://shootthecore.moonpod.com



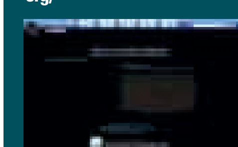
WORLD OF SPECTRUM
We've mentioned WoS many times, but it's just so damned good we're going to mention it yet again. Filled with reviews, archived magazines and even legal games, World of Spectrum is quite simply one of the best archives around.
www.worldofspectrum.org

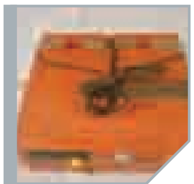


LEMON AMIGA
The sister site of Lemon64 is dedicated to all things Amiga. As well as reader reviews, screenshots and interviews, you'll find a bustling forum full of enthusiastic Amiga fans who are more than willing to answer any questions you may have. An excellent and informative site.
www.lemonamiga.com

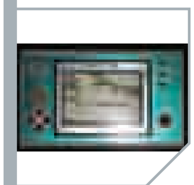


GAME INNOVATION DATABASE
Want to know what was the first game to use 'bullet time'? Well the answer's here. If only videogames were a subject at our local pub quiz, this handy little website would allow us to clean right up.
http://www.gameinnovation.org/

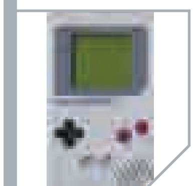




SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAME JOU
- PATLABOR



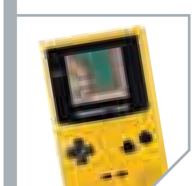
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite its age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact Game Boy, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic Game Boy. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



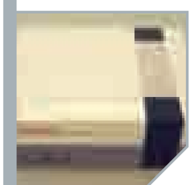
GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge-based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought-after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of its cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and it's very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72-pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of the company's most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



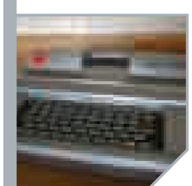
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from 1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips. The 200 series consists of front-loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (more with DVC)**
This is the consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000 that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



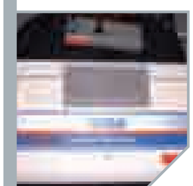
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance its capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- SKIES OF ARCADIA
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. With add-on tuner, could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



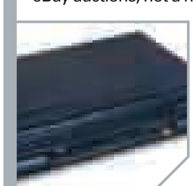
SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (according to eBay)**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection.

Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



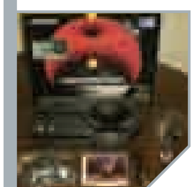
MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.



GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.
- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.
- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (more with games)**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook-style boxes.
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse that, despite an amazing catalogue of games, never really took off.
- BURNING RANGERS
- RADIANT SILVERGUN
- PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

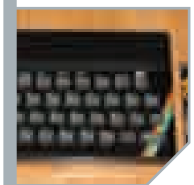
SINCLAIR



ZX-80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) Apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.
- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
- SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM+
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**

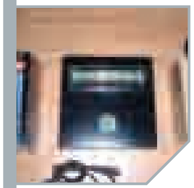


ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, the Spectrum was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.
- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

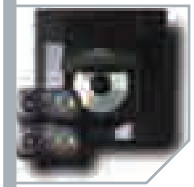
SNK



NEO-GEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High-powered home system by SNK. Features many high-quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



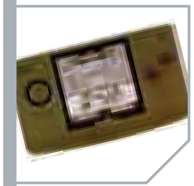
NEO-GEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) (multi-slot systems cost more)**
High-powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home-based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of Neo-Geo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted.)
- METAL SLUG 3
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- BLAZING STAR



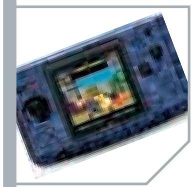
NEO-GEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) (varies)**



NEO-GEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based Neo-Geo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of Neo-Geo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.
- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHODOWN RPG



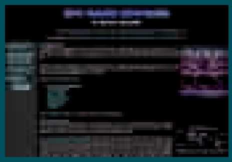
NEO-GEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



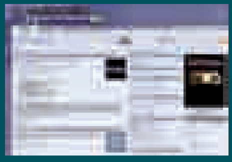
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld Neo-Geo systems by SNK that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system, though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.
- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

RETRO GAMING SITES

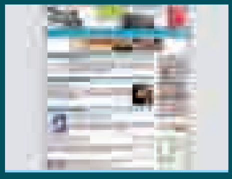
CPC GAME REVIEWS
All praise to Nicholas Campbell. He's filled his fantastic site with hundreds upon hundreds of CPC reviews. This is the definitive collection of CPC reviews on the internet. What's more, it's even possible to download certain games for your own pleasure (providing you own the originals of course). Amstrad owners should definitely check this site out as it may be able to fulfil all your Amstrad desires.
www.cpcgamereviews.co.uk



REMIX64.COM
If you're one of those 8-bit computer owners that felt only the Commodore 64 could make decent music then tune into this great website. Filled with an array of remixes for both the C64 and the Amiga, Remix64 is a genuine delight for the ears.
www.remix64.com



THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE ARCHIVE
If you want news on the retro games that are available on Nintendo's Virtual Console then you have no choice but to visit this superb site, hosted by Retro Gamer's very own Damien McFerran. Featuring news and unbiased reviews, the Virtual Console Archive is for all those Nintendo fans with a passion for retro gaming.
www.vc-reviews.com



Special thanks to **lofi-gaming-org.uk** who supplied several of our screenshots

SCORE<1> HI-SCORE

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retro GAMER

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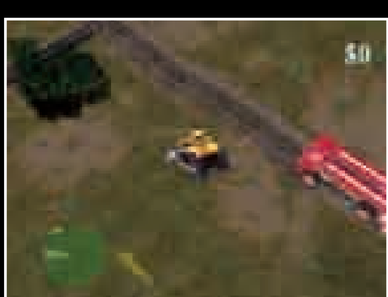
INVASION IMMINENT!

THE DEFINITIVE SPACE INVADERS
AFTER TWO MONTHS OF FULL REST, STUART CAMPBELL PREPARES TO TACKLE TAITO'S MIGHTY SPACE INVADERS FRANCHISE AND IT'S SHAPING UP TO BIG THE BIGGEST 'DEFINITIVE' EVER



OTHER EXCITING FEATURES...

- » We get a chance to go behind the scenes of the Atari 2600 classic *Miner 2049er*
- » Sega's Game Gear is the latest handheld to get the full Retroinspection treatment
- » The creators of the Amiga version of *Batman the Movie* explain how they managed to craft one of the greatest movie tie-ins of all time



THE MAKING OF…

BLAST CORPS – Discover the origins of one of Rare's best, and most underrated, games… the mighty *Blast Corps*

END/GAME



SUNSET RIDERS

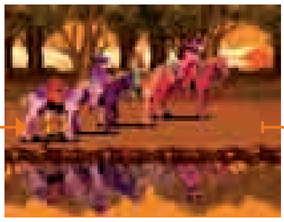
Cowboys are cool, so therefore a videogame featuring cowboys is going to be ever cooler. Retro Gamer grabs a stetson and reminisces over the ending of the excellent Sunset Riders. Yee har!



SCREEN 1
Rootin' tootin' varmints from all sides assault you, but your aim is true and with a few well-placed shots your enemies fall dead. Next time we'll make sure we don't play on our own.



SCREEN 2
The tremendous battle with Sir Justin Rose is finally over, so why not gaze over the sparkling sack of gold coins you now have in your possession. Time to share out the spoils…



SCREEN 3
Even with four riders in your gang, it soon becomes obvious that everyone is now set for life. And as the sun sets, the four friends decide upon their future.



SCREEN 4
The heroic quartet do their best 'heigh ho Silver' impressions and set off in pursuit of a brand new adventure, leaving us patiently awaiting their next arcade outing…



SCREEN 5
Which sadly never arrived. Still, try not to shed any tears and just look at this last screenshot of the foursome heading off for a new adventure that we never got to play. 'Sniff'.